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CONTENTS

Shall We Close or Open Doors.....Page 3
—George Walker Buckner

Toward a Better Understanding and Image of the Russian Orthodox Church .....Page 6
—George Earle Owen

Russian Orthodoxy and Faith and Order.....Page 11
—Robert Tobias

Our Heritage and Destiny.....Page 16
—J. Irwin Miller

The Garrison Lectures.....Page 26
—Lawrence W. Bash

Strategy of Ecumenical Concerns.....Page 48
—UCMS Study Document

The Strategy of Ecumenical Concerns: Some Theological Observations .....Page 56
—William Baird

Statement: Re: Resolution No. 52, Concerning Political Activities of the National Council of Churches.....Page 63
—George G. Beazley, Jr.

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SHALL WE CLOSE OR OPEN DOORS?

By GEORGE WALKER BUCKNER

EVEN before the World Council of Churches came officially into being in Amsterdam in 1948 the concept at its very heart was that it should include all Christian bodies which wished to become part of "a fellowship of churches which accept Jesus Christ as God and Saviour."

This concept guided and was adopted by those who took part in the Conference on Life and Work in Oxford and the Conference on Faith and Order in Edinburgh, both held in 1937. At Utrecht in Holland the following May delegates from all over the world adopted a provisional constitution for the proposed new world body. Dr. R. Graham Frank, General Secretary of the International Convention of Disciples of Christ, was a delegate at that important meeting. He represented both the Disciples and the Congregational Christians. The October Assembly of the International Convention, meeting in Denver, was one of the first church bodies in the world to give preliminary approval to the proposed constitution.

There was never the slightest doubt in the minds of any concerned that the kind of World Council proposed was one based on Christian faith and Christian fellowship. It was to be a Council of *all* the churches. No consideration as to the social, economic or political outlook of members of the churches or of the countries in which they existed were thought to be in order. This same concept of inclusiveness continued to be the unchallenged basis on which leaders in the ecumenical movement proceded through the ten years in which the developing World Council carried the sub-title, "In Process of Formation."

One of the greatest disappointments at the First Assembly at Amsterdam in 1948 was that among the churches which failed to accept the invitation to send delegates was the Orthodox Church of Russia. This historic church not only declined to come but it also sent a message indicating why it did not feel that it could participate in the movement. It was critical of the leaders of the movement which was developing into the World Council on the ground that its interests were political and that it was certain to be under western control. The long years of isolation of the Russian Orthodox Church had prevented it from understanding the real purposes and motives which were stirring other churches around the globe. That church's decision at Amsterdam seemed to

many to reflect its own deep need for just the kind of a fellowship the World Council hoped to provide.

Through the thirteen years and more since the Amsterdam Assembly, the World Council's Central Committee, its staff, and specially designated individuals have sought to make clear to the Russian Church, as well as to other non-member churches, its interest and concern in the total life and work of *all* the churches. In these years I have been present at all of the meetings of the Central Committee with the exception of one. To my knowledge, there has not been a single such meeting in which the Committee has not discussed seriously the question of the status of relations with the Russian Orthodox Church. Satisfaction has come as misconceptions and misunderstandings have gradually been replaced with beginnings of knowledge and an approach to understanding.

Contacts with the Russian Church were at first tentative and timid. Following the Evanston Assembly of 1954 Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft and Bishop Otto Dibelius gave copies of the principal decisions of the Assembly to the Berlin representatives of the Orthodox Church of Russia for transmission to the Moscow Patriarch. This was of great importance in that it gave Russian church leaders a comprehensive report of just what the World Council was discussing and what it was doing. This led to an exchange of correspondence between the Patriarchate and the Central Committee. Then, in 1958, three representatives from each group met in Utrecht, Holland, for personal conference. This was followed by an invitation from the Central Committee for the Moscow Patriarchate to send observers to any of its meetings. Such observers came to the meetings in Rhodes in 1959 and in St. Andrews in 1960. There have also been exchange of visits between representatives of the headquarters groups in Geneva and Moscow.

With this background in mind, it seems to me that the decision of the Orthodox Church of Russia early in 1961 to seek membership in the World Council of Churches is to be welcomed. It is in keeping with the basic principles on which the Council was founded and is a demonstration of the persuasive power of Christian fellowship. Had the Russian Church chosen to do so it could have taken membership in the World Council at Amsterdam, just as the Disciples of Christ chose to do. Its coming will make the Council more truly a *world* body of Christian believers. And the Russian Church, in turn, cannot fail to be strengthened as it establishes new ties with

the larger Christian fellowship. The Russian Church needs such a relationship and, I believe, knows that it does.

I can only assume that the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi will act favorably on the application of the Orthodox Church of Russia for membership. The only objection to doing this that I have heard is based on political alignments in a tragically divided world. To me it is fantastic to concede the possibility that delegates to the Assembly from churches all over the world will be guided by political feelings in applying tests of Christian fellowship.

What is the World Council of Churches? What is its deep nature?

A simple answer to that question is discovered in a report made to the World Council's Central Committee by the General Secretary and incorporated in the Committee's report to the New Delhi Assembly. Here are the words:

"It is an instrument forged by the churches to enable them to fulfil their common calling in witness and service and to prepare for a clearer manifestation of the unity of the Church."

The unity of the church will not be made manifest by a process of exclusion. A true "fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ" will not close doors on any who confess that loyalty.

TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND IMAGE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

By GEORGE EARLE OWEN

PERSONAL INTEREST

IT WAS my privilege during the summer of 1960 to visit Russia for the first time, and see at first hand the Russian Orthodox Church. The exotic character of this Eastern Church has always interested and fascinated me. My first direct contact in the United States was a "Reconciliation Tour" visit to one of these churches in New York City. I wanted a better understanding of a misunderstood church.

Another memorable experience was attending the festive Easter services of the Greek Orthodox in Buenos Aires. There is, of course, a similarity in the worship, architecture, and character of the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches.

A "STRANGE" CHURCH

American Protestants begin their thinking about churches with rather definite ideas of what a church is or should be. Churches that do not fit into this general pattern of preconceived notions, are thought to be strange, if not unorthodox. For most Protestants the Russian Orthodox Church is Russian and far from orthodox by Western Protestant standards and concepts. They forget, if they ever knew, that there was a distinct break in 1054 between the Eastern and Western churches. This was a very drastic chasm. Constantinople became a "Second Rome" and later after further breaks Moscow was spoken of as a "Third Rome." It is understandable that the invitation in 1948 for the Russian Orthodox Church to join in the formation of the World Council of Churches was greeted by this church with some skepticism. The fact that the Russian Orthodox Church did not respond to this initial invitation left few qualms as far as the average American churchman was concerned. Continued contacts and communication with this church have dissolved much of the sense of strangeness and estrangement.

Now with the definite prospect that the Russian Orthodox Church will be voted into the World Council of Churches at the New Dehli Assembly in November, voices are being raised about the nature and character of this *strange* church. Is it a puppet

of the Soviet government? Will it fit into the World Christian Community family of churches? What contribution can it make? How will it affect other communions? The long separation of the Russian Orthodox Church from the World Christian Community, the distinct differences between the Eastern and Western heritages account for the *strangeness* of this sister communion in the world Christian family. It therefore becomes very desirable and necessary to understand something more of the nature of the Russian Orthodox Church. This was my major motivation in making a visit to Russia in 1960, to see at first hand the Russian Orthodox Church and how it fares under the Communist regime.

Common Images of Russia

In no small degree we all think and feel in terms of, and in response to, the pictures and images that have become a part of our cultural heritage. To the average person the term Russia conjures up a host of pictures, some of which are obviously distorted—marauding Tatars, Bolsheviks, conniving Rasputins, communist spies carrying concealed bombs, or the older pictures of wealthy, boisterous noblemen and wretched serfs, fabulous tsars reeking in wealth, as well as corrupt and obsequious Russian Orthodox priests. To one who has read any of the novels of Dostoevsky or Tolstoy, as well as some European history, the Russian picture gallery will be more vivid and varied. One book that continues to give color to any picture I have of Russia is the not-so-well-known, but remarkable novel by Eugene Sue, *The Wandering Jew*. Thus if we wish to understand the Russian Orthodox Church in the contemporary world we also need to understand the people of Russia and the Orthodox Church, both past and present. A good deal of our understanding is conditioned by the images we have from history, literature and other sources. One way to correct this is by a personal visit, and by questions and impressions one gets from such a visit. This has been the basis of this writer's *review* of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The mention of the word orthodox triggers a succession of scenes with both a Greek and Russian color and character. One immediately thinks of the beautiful St. Sophia Church in Istanbul (Constantinople), exotic Byzantine art, the strange onion-shaped domes of Russian churches, gilded cupolas, bearded, long-haired priests and patriarchs, plain peasants women walking up to kiss the Greek Cross and make an offering, with possibly whatever images one has of an Oriental church. The concern and purpose of

this paper is to call attention to the importance of images and for the writer at least to endeavor to get a more accurate understanding of the Russian Orthodox Church, one that is emancipated from images and ideas that may not be true to reality.

THE PROTESTANT IMAGE OF THE CHURCH

The average American Protestant, it was pointed out, has certain ideas and images that come to his mind when the word church is mentioned—chapels, cathedrals, stained glass windows, burning candles, altars, pulpits, communion services, Bibles, preachers, priests, robed choirs, Sunday School rooms, sonorous bells, towering steeples. More than this the idea of church conveys activities for the ordinary American churchman. Thus when the word "church" is mentioned he envisages a fellowship, some would say more vividly a club, generally in this person's same social and/or income bracket. For a number of people this means a rather free wheeling, glad-handed association of like-minded people. Belonging to the church includes structured activities, social action and community service, functional organizations, committee meetings, generally conducted with business-like preciseness. The church is thought of as the natural locus for Boy Scouts, Girls Scouts and youth activities, as well as recreational activities. Witness the number of gyms and bowling alleys that are still a part of some church buildings. This is the image many people have of the church and it may not be too far from what actually exists.

If one goes to Russia looking for something like this, he is bound to be disappointed. Such activities are not only alien to the Russian Orthodox Church but they are forbidden. Mutual aid societies and organizations of this character are not allowed and are not even asumed to be a part of the Church's responsibility. The same thing can be said for the Sunday School and the whole program of religious education that is so integrally a part of the American church life. Take the word "Pioneer" as an example of how we think in images. For most American Christians this brings to mind Christian young people (Intermediates) in church sponsored camps or conferences engaged in folk games, singing together, friendship circles, worship services and the like. The summer in Moscow I inquired why I did not see many young people around and I was told that they were at "the pioneer camps." These are state-directed camps where young people are endoctrinated with atheism and revolutionary socialism. This is the kind

of activity that the Church can not engage in. It presents a real liability for the church and a real opportunity for the government.

The Image and Concept of Separation

The concept of the church in relation to the state for the American Protestant is one of separation or tension. The image is one of a wall of separation or a continued tug-of-war between church and state in the realm of religious liberty. The idea the average person has of the church and state in Russia is one of hand and glove; the governing hand is the state itself. The new image I have of church and state in Russia is one of a "convenient marriage." The picture is one of a huge man holding hands with a timid young lady, who obviously is at the mercy of this mighty man. One way to understand the relationship of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Russian government is that of accommodation rather than separation, of limited freedom and tolerated co-existence, rather than one of tension.

The "image of separation" for the Russian Orthodox Church is separation from the world, rather than separation from the "State." Given the totalitarianism that has always characterized Russian society there exists today a fairly "happy" relationship between the government and the church. This seems rather hard for American Protestants to understand. When Russian history is more fully understood and granted then this is not such a difficult task. Separation from the world has developed a more non-rational, mystical type of religion. The American church so closely identified with American business could do with some of this.

The New Church In Russia

When the Communist party which runs the government came into power, it threw out the baby with the bath. In this case it was a blood bath to free the Russian people from a tyranny of the tsars' state-church dictatorship, and the baby was the Russian Orthodox Church. From 1918 until 1941 there was an effective and rather violent effort to destroy the Russian Orthodox Church. The invasion of Russia by Hitler in 1941 changed this considerably. When Hitler announced that he would "restore religion," great masses in occupied villages, and even in the Red Army, deserted to the enemy. Two days after the invasion Stalin opened the press and radio to the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, the patriarch Sergius. The net result of all of this was a new rapprochement between church and state. The generalization seemed to be—it is

better to have the church with its powerful traditions as an ally rather than an enemy.

The one thing that impresses American visitors about the Russian Orthodox Church is the gorgeous splendor and ecclesiastical pomp that goes along with its worship. The two-or three-hour services, directed by priests in beautiful brocaded vestments, the pageantry of their movement, the sonorous chants of the choirs, the tingling sensation created by the incense, the genuflection on the part of the devout worshipers, their reverent, and sometimes what seems to be superstitious posture, all impress one that the character of this church really centers in a life of worship. Worship *to* God is the heart of religion for the Russian Orthodox Church. This worship is not something man does for his own benefit—it is what he does to his God. Naturally all the accouterments of worship make their impression and speak their symbolic language. Underneath the layer of all this ceremony one detects a Eucharistic hunger. This is confirmed when it is realized that fifty million people in the Soviet Union still worship and call themselves Russian Orthodox Christians. Religion has survived and continues to survive in many forms and ways.

My impression is that the Russian Orthodox Church is *alive* in its sense of mystic union with God and Christ, firm in its faith in the power of God to guide the church through the vicissitudes of history, detached from the political area, but bound to the Great Tradition that is a part of the nature of the church, hungry for fellowship with their Christians, aware of what Communism has done to better the economic life of Russia but not buying the atheism and materialism of Marxist Communism.

This church with its deep sense of Holy Spirit has a contribution to make to the Church universal. It brings to the symphony of Christian faith a deep, perhaps sadder note that is needed. I for one welcome this temporarily separated member of the Body of Christ back into the larger Christian family and into the World Council of Churches.

RUSSIAN ORTHODOXY AND FAITH AND ORDER

By ROBERT TOBIAS

I HAVE been asked to comment on the implications for Faith and Order of the probable admission of the Russian Orthodox Church into membership in the World Council of Churches. The Russian Church has applied for membership and definitive decision is expected to be taken by the present member churches at New Delhi in November.

Our comments must be brief. To say too much is to presume too much. There are too many variables for predictions, and the Holy Spirit is not necessarily served in its work by human divination. Nontheless, some things can be said concerning our complementary witnesses and some guide lines suggested as we undertake our common labors.

1. *A New Ecumenical Look.*

Fundamentally, membership of the Russian Church does not bring any fresh theological perspective to Faith and Order. There have been competent Orthodox theologians—Greek, Russian, Byzantine, Bulgarian, Serbian—at the center of Faith and Order since 1920. But the admission of the Russian Church will add sufficiently to their number as to engage the kind of attention which has long been due.

However in terms of numbers the *face* of Faith and Order should be greatly changed. Heretofore Faith and Order has had a half-dozen Orthodox representatives in its 120-man Commission. Of the 50 vacancies to be filled at New Delhi nearly 30 should be filled by Orthodox representatives, another 10 when the Rumanian, Bulgarian and Serbian churches become members. At that point the appearance, the method and the agenda for Faith and Order work may be considerably changed, becoming both more Protestant and more Orthodox, i.e., less determined by intra-Protestant and Protestant—Roman Catholic polarity. Discussions are likely to be set much more in the context of doxology than philosophy, conclusions left to the open-ended process by which the Holy Spirit steers "Tradition," while the Orthodox facility for telescoping history should satisfy our Western impulse for historical studies to be "relevant." They will be that, perhaps painfully so, as, e.g., with the proposed study of Arianism, 400 A.D.—1961 A.D.

2. *Sharpening of Tensions*

The timing of the Orthodox Church's admission within the New Delhi agenda may make us more aware, and painfully, of one acute issue. Action is to be taken on the Russian Church's application prior to action on the proposed merger of the IMC-WCC. The reasons for this are simply constitutional. The result may be Providential, or chaotic. If the Russian Church is accepted, and it must be, then the position of Orthodox member churches with regard to the merger with the IMC will be enormously strengthened. Heretofore their sensitivity on this question has not been taken half seriously enough outside of Geneva and the Orthodox orbit. They have been concerned that the WCC not lose its "churchly" character in favor of a cooperative enterprise of the mission-agencies-apart-from-the-churches. Further, the Eastern churches have suffered a long history of proselytism by Western churches, first Rome, then Protestantism. They have some difficulty distinguishing between Rome, main line reformed churches, and "sects"—all are "West." Can they now so quickly be reconciled to their former proselytizers? Will the merger encourage and abet further proselytism? Or will it be possible to come to a deeper and common theological and ecclesiological understanding of evangelism, of witness, and of pastoral responsibility which will reconcile and unite East and West in common witness?

While not wishing to avoid the real institutional and historic problems here involved, Faith and Order cannot but be concerned that the whole question be tackled at the level of ecclesiology and theology of evangelism, then move to consequential questions of organization and practice. Even so, it will take decades, perhaps centuries, of life together to undo the damage of nearly a thousand years of history—which hasn't yet stopped. If the ecumenical ship is not to flounder, some extraordinary patience at New Delhi will have to be exercised by all.

3. *Contact Points*

For the Orthodox churches, the area of major interest in the World Council is Faith and Order and the real oneness of the Church. They will not be content with denominational cooperation. But neither is Faith and Order. After three years of work, Faith and Order succeeded at St. Andrews in 1960 in having a re-statement of its objectives accepted by the Central Committee of the Council. It reads, in part:

> We believe that the unity which is both God's will and His gift to His Church is one which brings all in each place who confess Christ Jesus as Lord into a fully committed fellowship with one another through one baptism into Him, preaching the one Gospel and breaking the one bread, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all; and which at the same time unites them with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are acknowledged by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls the Church.

On this point and others, Faith and Order provides the arena for the common endeavor of Eastern and Western churches. Very serious attention will need to be given within Faith and Order to some additional requisites for real encounter: knowledge of Orthodox theology, familiarity with Russian history, facility with the Russian and Greek languages. English, French and German alone will not do.

4. *Orthodox Origins of Contemporary Thought*

The most significant contribution to the ecumenical movement in the past 30 years has been that of Eastern Orthodoxy, and much of that through theologians of Russian origin. This is reflected, though not so labeled, in the St. Andrews statement. Their ecclesiology has given stimulus or direction to a whole new theological methodology among Western Protestants, not to mention the effect of their λειτωργία upon western church life. Western Christians will need to be appraised of the Eastern origins of some of these most significant developments amongst us, which should then provide a much broader common base for conversation and life together.

5. *Common Ground*

There are some natural bridges between Orthodoxy and Protestantism. For example, the Eastern Church has preserved, *au fond,* the heritage and structure of the very early church, and while the Reformers may have assumed that they were laying new foundations for restoring that church, they were in less elaborate ways re-doing what Orthodoxy had continued to do from the beginning.

In its understanding of the relation of priest and congregation Orthodoxy is in some respects more akin to radical Protestantism than to Anglicanism or Catholicism, that is, there is a priestly function of the congregation as a whole including the "priest,"

and the priest may not even proceed with the Eucharist after a certain point unless th econgregation acclaims "He is worthy."

6. *An Ultimate Hope*

Will the Orthodox continue their "intransigence" with regard to dogma? Dogmas of Eastern Orthodoxy cannot be altered in conversations *with* the ecumenical movement. This must be recognized. But, when the whole Church is met *in* ecumenical council, then the dogma of the Church may be considered and articulated in fresh language. Any measures which involve sections of Orthodoxy and others toward a larger whole is a move toward that kind of reconsideration. And in any case, Orthodox dogmas of the Church are not detailed beyond the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Beyond these there is a possibility of open discussion, as is already the case among the Orthodox, on such questions as the limits of the Church. In this area of "freedom" the Orthodox participants are bound to raise some new questions in Faith and Order, among others the doctrine of grace, which Faith and Order "did" at Edinburgh in 1937 and has scarcely touched since. Others must surely include the sacraments, the sobornost as a new factor in the question of "succession" and historicity, doxology and doxophany.

Orthodox dogmas, as Edmund Schlink has pointed out (*Kerygma und Dogma,* No. 3, 1958), are formulated within the structure of doxology, and are therefore vitally related to the worship service. In the West, dogmatic formulations for both Protestants and Catholics are much more in the Roman stream of rational and philosophical articulations. On this point our Orthodox brethren, together with Barth, may push us to be better Protestants, integrating faith again with confession toward God and man.

7. *Beyond Faith and Order*

In terms of getting acquainted after decades of separation, it will be important for western Christians to remember that ecumenically-minded leaders from the East are often young, and international experience is new to them. It can be expected that they will approach international contacts outside Faith and Order cautiously; they have a government to reassure. In academic and abstract theological conversation they may feel unsure of themselves (which may account for a degree of brittleness), whereas their religious experience may give them unparalleled confidence and depth.

We should all be ready for some surprises. Secular reports here have not given us a full picture of the facts of their life. And a great deal has happened in Protestant thought since their contact with Protestant liberalism prior to 1917. Further, the fact of our associating together, and sharing in personal experiences, will pose for us some soul-searching questions about the soundness of religious life in the West. But this much is sure, the desire for re-establishing spiritually-based ecumenical relationships, even beyond World Council membership, is there, and the hurdles to be overcome at the political level are no longer insurmountable. The hurdles of language, of misinterpreted history, of mutual confidence are for us to work at. A first step forward may be taken by re-reading and re-interpreting their past statements and actions, and ours, in the context of what was possible and required.

But the most important response of the West will be to thank God that after years of forced estrangement—indeed since before the Reformation—we are now joined together, and then to make that joining a reality by learning their language, by familiarizing ourselves with the intervening years, by getting acquainted with their concerns and living as it were in their situation. From that point on, travel, exchanges of publications, students, and professors, common study of specific issues of faith—there will be possibility of doing as much as we are ready to do.

OUR HERITAGE AND DESTINY

By J. IRWIN MILLER

DELIVERED AT THE KANSAS CITY ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) TUESDAY EVENING, OCTOBER 3, 1961

AS I BECOME older, I find that I am bound to this Brotherhood of ours by ties that are stronger than I had ever guessed in my youth. I am bound to it by conviction. Its freedom, its confession, its warm, generous inclusive love are a part of my life. I am bound to it by sentiment. I have grown up among Disciples, stuffed myself to the point of pain at church dinners with Disciples. I have dressed up for church pageants, taught Sunday School classes, and sung in choirs with Disciples. I am bound to it by History. Both of my grandfathers were Disciples' ministers. I am bound to this brotherhood in every possible way, and I cherish these ties. Out of that affection and concern, I wish to speak to you tonight on the subject of this convention—"Our Heritage and Destiny."

Our heritage is a matter of great pride with us. This pride is pardonable because it is not a pride in ourselves. It is a pride in what our predecessors thought and felt and accomplished. In a day when Christian sects were intensely devoted to the multitude of minute differences which divided them, when Christians of all varieties were enormously certain of their own correctness, when unity was on no one's lips because each Christian thought he was a member of "the only true church," those gifted and humble individuals from whom our brotherhood has issued, individuals deeply committed to the churches of their childhood, were nevertheless moved irresistably to lose their cherished denominational lives in an effort to obey Christ's prayer that "all may be one." It was a full hundred years later before our sister communions began to catch fire from this original passion, and in the meantime, our own communion grew with an enthusiasm and rapidity not equalled in its day.

Then arose a portion of our heritage in whcih we can take only shame. A communion come into existence to obey the Lord's prayer for unity, one of whose phrases was "in all things charity," fell to quarreling, decided that all sorts of matters were of more importance than charitable unity, and fell apart, giving to Christendom

an example of disunity rather than unity. It is no wonder that the growth slowed, the excitement waned, and the example became tarnished.

Finally, a third and brighter part of our heritage appeared. It is to be found in the perceptive, selfless, and enthusiastic leadership and participation offered by Disciples in the great phenomenon of our own century—the coming together of the churches. In each of the interdenominational organizations which came into being, Disciples as a communion and as individuals were found to be active supporters and members, considerably out of proportion to their numerical size in this country.

My own awareness of the worth of this portion of our heritage has been especially sharpened by my participation in the National Council of Churches these last ten years. The simple requirement for membership, "acceptance of Jesus Christ as Divine Lord and Savior," is understood in a very profound way by every Disciple, and is a concept first stated on this continent by Disciples. Disciples have given leadership continuously to the Council. In ten years, Disciples have furnished five vice presidents, one president, the general secretary and associate general secretary. Disciple members of the Council's divisions, departments, general board, and general assembly are vigorous and influential, for Disciples are committed to all manifestations of the oneness of those who call Jesus Lord, and the leadership which they have given the ecumenical movement both nationally and locally is one of the brightest portions of our heritage.

But this heritage, of which we can be proud and for which we must be grateful, now places upon you and me a responsibility and an obligation of very considerable weight. What can we offer in our day and what of our own doing can we transmit to our children that will have a value comparable to the value of that which was passed on to us? If we do no more than hand along what we have received, we have been only janitors and custodians for our creative ancestors, and are scarcely to be considered worthy descendents. Our destiny should, therefore, give us cause for concern, for the making of it lies in our hands and in no others.

Let us approach a consideration of our destiny by means of a New Testament story and a New Testament text. The story is found in the Book of Acts, and it concerns Simon the Magician:

> "There was a man named Simon, who had previously practised magic in the city and amazed the nation of Samaria . . . and they gave heed to him. But when they

> believed Philip . . . they were baptized. Both men and women, even Simon himself, believed, and after being baptized, he continued with Philip. Now when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the Apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me also this power, that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'."

Here is our story. It is a story, if not about a villain, nevertheless, about a man for whom we have little use. Of Simon, Peter even said, "Repent of this wickedness. Pray to the Lord that the intent of your heart may be forgiven you!" And yet, what had Simon done? He had believed. Is it not right to believe? He had been baptized. Is it not right to be baptized? He had desired the Holy Spirit. Is it not right to desire the Holy Spirit? What's wrong here? Why do we condemn this man who in a quite legitimate way was right in his actions? Well, the answer is pretty easy: He was right, all right, but he was right for the wrong reason! Simon desired the Holy Spirit so that he could make some money out of it. The Pharisees were right, too. And Jesus said, "Practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do, for they preach but do not practise." They were right for the wrong reason.

It is never enough merely to be right. It is in fact often most dangerous to be right! For appearing to be right, justified by the excuse of correctness, freed from the restraint of self-doubts, deaf to the warnings of conscience, men can, when convinced they are "right," run more swiftly and easily down paths of wickedness, stupidity, and tragedy than if they had been restrained by humble doubts. It is not enough to be right. We must be right for the right reasons!

This story tells us something: Nearly every man constructs a fabric of rightness, of correctness, of reasonableness to cover what he wants to do. Khrushchev is working for "peace." Castro is dedicating himself to the "poor." Franco wishes to preserve the "faith." This kind of fabric of "rightness" Jesus and Paul abhorred, and instead they searched out men's hearts and motives. Mere correctness, our Lord warns us, is never to be confused with righteousness.

Now, at last, let us come to our test: In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he says these words: "It has been reported to me that there is quarreling among you, my brethren: What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ'." My text is not this

whole passage. It is the last four words, "I Belong to Christ." What a wonderful sentence! Under some circumstances in some times, what courage it has taken even to say these words, let alone live up to them. What great sermons could be preached on it. And yet, in this first chapter of First Corinthians, Paul condemns the members of the church at Corinth for saying, "I belong to Christ." This is worth a little investigation, and by no one more than by the Disciples.

The Corinthians were right to say, "I belong to Christ." This was a fovorite expression of Paul's. To the Romans he said, "You are called to belong to Jesus Christ." Later on in Corinthians he said, "So also in Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order, Christ, the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ." And in Galatians he holds highest "Those who belong to Christ Jesus."

If it is right to "belong to Christ," why then are these early Christians condemned for saying, "I belong to Christ?" They were right, but Paul saw that they were right for the wrong reason. It is one thing for a Christian martyr to answer a Roman emperor saying, "I belong to Christ" when his life is the penalty for so speaking; it is quite another thing for one of two Christians in a dispute to say, "I belong to Christ," implying that *others* do not! And right here is where we Disciples can always be in danger. It is on this point that we may most easily miss our destiny.

Paul's Corinthians were guilty of self-righteousness, saying, "I belong to Christ, but you fellows don't. I have the right answers, not you." Reminding us of the statement of the Pharisee, "Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men." What is wrong with self-righteousness? Besides being irritating, besides alienating affection, there are two grievous errors involved in self-righteousness: The first is that it is based on a thoroughly false premise—the premise that I know, that I have some sort of conclusive, final answer on this subject or any subject. Self-righteousness is a denial of the eternal words of Paul, "For now we know in part," and of the provocative words of Ecclesiastes, "I have seen the business that God has given the sons of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."

The first error of the self-righteous man is that he thinks he knows something once and for all. And the second error follows from the first: Once a man thinks he knows something, he stops

seeking, he stops thinking. Someone has said, "The conclusions reached by a process of thought are usually the conclusion of the thought." Thinking too often stops when a conclusion is reached. The great inheritance which has been transmitted to us is not so much the conclusions which our ancestors reached (If we will read their writings, these conclusions were often stated in quite tentative, even qualified words.) but the example which they have furnished us of spirits so courageous, so intelligent, so aware that "we know in part" as to be willing to re-examine and restudy their most cherished inherited conclusions and to move to whatever new ground their study led them.

We must never suppose that our ancestors were not religious men deeply committed to the faith in which they had been raised, as firmly bound to the faith of their fathers as you and I are bound to the faith of our fathers. Their glory and their contribution to mankind and the inheritance which they passed on to us was their courage of spirit, which was great enough to lead them to re-examine carefully and critically that which was most dear to them, preferring truth above all else, and to stand on the ground to which their search led them, without regard for the ancient ties that might be broken, the distress of spirit which they might suffer, the loneliness which would be theirs when they differed publicly with the multitude.

Considering all this, how then may we best honor those to whom we are so greatly indebted? How may we realize the destiny which history might most commend us for achieving; and how can we in our own time and in our own way best serve the Lord to whom we are committed?

I suggest we might begin by acknowledging, as a brotherhood, that our knowledge is imperfect; that we know in part, that the ways of God are past our finding out. The implications of such an acknowledgment are very important. When we say, as the Corinthians did, "I belong to Christ," implying that we have final truth, that ours is the correct theology, that our answers to church practises are right in some final unchangeable way, then we are committing ourselves to a static, finished religion, whose members can hope only to look back, only to contemplate an ever receding past. When we admit that our knowledge is imperfect, then we hold before ourselves and all men the exciting prospect of adding to our knowledge and enlarging our understanding of our heavenly Father and His purpose for us, just as our ancestors and all the great minds of the church have done in their time. Believing, as we do, that

everything, visible, invisible, thoughts, persons, motives, all is the handiwork of God, then every study is a study of God. The physicist studies God's work, and from it can add to our knowledge of God's nature. So with the mathematician, the chemist, the engineer, and the artist. It has been no great problem for them to admit gaps in their knowledge, to experiment, to rethink, and, consequently, to discover and to advance man's understanding of God and His creation. Why should the theologian be more bound than they?

Think of the manner of Christ's appearance on this planet. Though he was clearly a man of solid learning in the religious history and teachings of his day, a master of discussion with priests, Pharisees, Romans, peasants—all who talked with him, yet he chose to leave to his followers and to us not a single written word. And the same is true of his closest Disciples. Nor are Paul's letters in conflict with this pattern. Only some have survived, and these are less general comprehensive works designed to leave for all history an ordered, inclusive statement of Christian doctrine and practise than they are individual letters, arising out of local or individual problems and needs, and written to individual congregations. This pattern has disturbed Christians from the second century on. We have felt that Christian doctrine ought to have been so clearly set out that men could never differ and separate over it; that ordinances should have been established and explained so clearly that no disagreement could possibly exist; that church government should have been so specifically blue-printed as to permit no willful variations. Because we think these things ought to have been done, and because we are loathe to criticize our Lord and his Apostles, we and all Christians say that the answer and the blue-print is really there if you hunt for it. So Christians for 1500 years have gone to the scriptures, selected an inference here, a verse there, skipped over passages which didn't quite fit in, and each has come up with his own right answer and correct blue-print, and has said—"I belong to Christ. I have the answers." The only problem is that nearly everyone came up with a different answer and a different blue-print.

There is another possibility which we should consider. There is the possibility that our Lord knew what He was doing and did it with deliberate purpose, when He left us only the memory of a perfect life, and a scattering of unforgettable words. Instead of a blue-print, we have a hint, a mystery that calls us forever to new and exciting discovery. It may be perhaps this very characteristic in Christianity which has kept it so compelling, so provocative, and

which has stirred those societies most influenced by it to be questioning, exploring, experimental and anxious to change things for the better. I suggest that, if we Disciples, in our day, wish to make a contribution to Christendom comparable to that which we have inherited, we determine to cast off those elements of self-righteousness which assume for ourselves a virtue belonging to our ancestors, and in humility of mind and spirit strike out boldly and with excitement—first of all in theology.

Disciples have been notoriously weak in the field of the study of God. There is now a time and a need for a theology which will aim at a great synthesis of all the hints of God. His nature and purpose, which He has laid out for us. There are hints of God's nature to be discovered by the astro-physicist. We have moved from an assumption that this planet was the center of God's interest and purpose to a knowledge that, in our galaxy alone, the mathematical probabilities point to the existence of more than 100,000 inhabited planets, and our galaxy is only one of an infinite number.

There are hints to be discovered by the biologist. The microcosmos, the world of the small, astonishes the student no less than the macrocosmos, the world of the large and infinite. And the delicate, elegant construction of the cockroach is no less incredible, no less a miracle than the incomprehendable reaches of space.

There are hints to be discovered by the mathematician. We are surrounded, not by mere chaos, but by an order, a regularity, and a precision greater than anything man himself can contrive. Comets, and spring, and winter, and the sun, and moon, all appear on time, exactly as calculated, and our lives hang on this precision. What does this tell us about God?

You and I believe that we are made in the image of God. In the study of ourselves, we can learn about God. Walt Whitman said "In the faces of men and women I see God," and that is true. What hints has God left here for our finding? There now lies available to us, as to no generation of our race, the opportunity to make a giant leap forward in our understanding of our Father and His purposes for His children, and no group is less hindered from seizing this opportunity than the Disciples. We are called to lead this age in an experimental theology, which will bring together under one consideration every facet, new and old, of our knowledge of God, presenting Him to His children as one God of astonishing variety, interest, creativity, versatility, whom we are commanded to imitate in all His aspects—and to the very limits of all those divine capacities which He has planted in us. And we are further called,

as we transmit this to our descendants, to remind them that we, too, "knew in part," and that their opportunities to add to their knowledge of our Father are no less limited than we have found ours to be.

A destiny for us can be found in other places, too. We may have seized to too quick and too simple conclusions about Christ's ordinances, ignoring both uncomfortable passages of scripture, and the difficult latest findings of archeologists, choosing one of Paul's symbols for baptism, and ignoring his equally valid symbol for communion. Here, too, in deeper, more humble study is a destiny to be found for us, and a contribution to the thought of all Christendom.

A destiny also awaits those who undertake a new examination of the problems and possibilities of church organization and government. Through the period covered by the writings of the New Testament, church organization moved from a sort of purely communal group at the beginning, to a fairly high type of organization probably with both local and regional officers by the time the last book was written. We have, again, possibly too quickly, seized on one particular period and said, "This is the pattern. Conform to this." A line of investigation justifying some thoughtful examination lies in the possibility that early Christians considered that church organization should be flexible, should continuously accommodate itself to the changing needs of changing times, for this is what we see happen in the pages of the New Testament. Such an investigation might open teh possibility of enormously improving the effectiveness of the church, and of strengthening our witness to the present age.

There is a destiny awaiting us, too, in the area of worship. Disciples have paid less attention to worship than most Christian communions, being at heart a rational, even argumentative group of souls. Our worship forms and customs have been casually borrowed, and little studied. There is some superficial justification for this attitude, since early Christians, in New Testament times, had not yet got themselves church buildings, and seem mostly to have met in private homes, where they ate, sang, and learned together. But words alone have never been sufficient to encompass the gospel. Words are only an invention of man. The truths and purposes of God existed and ruled before words or language were ever invented, and will stand after words have disappeared from this earth. Men gain understanding of God and Christ Jesus from the best work of writers and preachers of words. But they gain

understanding and insight as well from the best work of great architects, of great painters, of great composers and musicians, of great poets. God has endowed us with capacities to create in many ways. By the use of each creative talent we can add to our understanding of Him, and without using every capacity to understand that which we have been given, our grasp of God will be less complete than it could be. Not to use what God has given us is clearly a sin in His sight. Not to use the best of what God has given us—or the best which human beings have wrought may be an equal sin, for how can a God of perfection be understood through mediocre, second-class preaching, sentimental, over-worked uninspired music, third-rate insipid art, pedestrian architecture, thoughtlessly planned, endlessly repeated worship services? Here, too, in this present day, lies opportunity—and, therefore, destiny for the Disciples.

Finally, we have another destiny. It is a destiny of courageous obedience to one of the clearest, most unmistakable of all the wishes of our Lord. Our destiny is to lose our lives. Do we think that the repeated statement of Jesus, "He who loses his life for my sake will find it," refers only to individuals, or perhaps only to early Christian martyrs? Do we think it has little reference to you and me—and none at all to brotherhoods, denominations, and communions of Christians? Oh rash assumption! What right have we to assume that, in this time when the separated members of Christ's body are becoming acutely conscious of their separation and guilty concerning it, we have any less cause for feeling of guilt? We can say—"I belong to Christ. Agree with us, and all will be solved." Is this "losing our lives" or hanging on to our lives? Every Christian group will say this with a conviction no less fervent than ours!

Now we have a priceless opportunity within our grasp. We have great Christian communions for the first time eager and ready to join hands in a witness of unity under Christ such as we have been preaching up and down this land for 150 years. We Disciples are about to be weighed in the balance. Will we solace ourselves with the appearance of eagerness, conversing endlessly, hoping that, by delay, we can pass the responsibility of decision on to another generation, or will we give the world an example of wholehearted, reckless obedience to Christ's great prayer? Will we choose proud adherence to our own peculiarities and try to pretend that *we* are not the ones who are disobedient to the Lord's prayer that all may be one, but that the disobedient ones are those who will not see things our way? Will we at the last moment try to save our lives? Our ancestors did lose their lives and by so

doing, by moving to new enlightened ground, they made a most honorable contribution to all Christendom. Was it a final and perfect one, to which nothing may ever be added? If we think so, we attribute to them a perfection which belongs to God rather than to men—a perfection which they would have been shocked to have ascribed to themselves.

Christendom today awaits the contribution which the Disciples might make to it: A contribution of example—the willingness to lose our brotherhood separateness in the cause of Christ; a contribution of leadership—building on our heritage to lead in humility all Christians to new and common ground; and a contribution of thought and spirit, showing a willingness and zeal to be bold and profound in searching out the meaning for men in the hints which God has scattered around us of his astonishing nature and his intoxicating purpose.

In St. Paul's Cathedral, there is an inscription on a monument to John Howard, the pioneer in prison reform, and this is how it reads: "He trod an open but unfrequented path to immortality." Now there is a path open to us Disciples in our time, as there was a path open to our ancestors in their time. As it did for them, for us also it leads to immortality. By way of this path, we can find our destiny. The choice is yours and mine.

THE GARRISON LECTURES

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By LAWRENCE W. BASH

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Freedom and Responsibility Among the Disciples of Christ

I—THE DIMINISHING RETURNS OF DISSENT

AS WE approach these comments on the thought of the Disciples of Christ in regard to the nature of the church, let it be understood that this is simply a report from the battlefield. I come before you as a parish minister, not a theologian. I may not be sure about the grand strategy but I know something of the ebb and flow of the battle. This is what things look like to those of us at work in the church today.

My intent is not to offer you an outline of the new ecclesiology. I can't spell it yet! The more modest scope of this study is to understand some of the issues of our time in the life of the church in which you will be involved. It is a critical review. It is supposed to be. It will confront us with some sharp contrasts between the church of the New Testament and the church on the next corner. If one were reviewing the impressive product of Angelican theology and were then to examine the life of the Church of England, he would see a contrast! Or compare Neo-Thomist theology with a study of the practices in Guadalupe Cathedral! And so it is with the Disciples of Christ.

This dichotomy is always with us—the church as we read about it in books of theology or in the New Testament . . . and the church as we know it in our own experience. It is something like reading from Betty Crocker's Picture Cookbook all day and then having to eat every meal at the local Greasy Spoon! Ecclesiology without anthropology is lost in the stratosphere.

The problem of the Disciples of Christ can be summarized in an event of which I heard. A church planned to develop a program of prayer in which every member of the congregation would be invited to come into the church to be in private prayer and meditation through at least a portion of an hour. There were enough members that eight persons could be assigned each day for a full year. The leaders prepared cards inviting every member to join a "Fellowship of Prayer," choosing one hour during the coming

year when he would enter the church for private worship using a guide especially prepared. When this project, which might seem unobjectionable in a church, came before an official body for discussion and approval, it eventuated in a half hour of heated discussion. It came to a climax with the comment of the man who is really an excellent churchman and ardent Christian. He said, "I don't like anything that smacks of regimentation. If we sign up to pray at a certain hour, in a few months one of us will be saying to his wife, 'Damn it, I've got to go down to the church and pray'." This in a sense is the problem of the Disciples. We resent discipline! Yet we have a faith in which discipline is intrinsic. Is it possible to be a Disciple without a discipline?

It is my own conclusion that the Disciples of Christ are more deeply concerned today with the perplexities raised by this question than any other. What is the Nature of the Church? This is a highly subjective judgment, based on no poll of public opinion. Within the limits of my own experience, I find this question coming to the fore, with many a problem which cannot be fully resolved until we have made some progress in our ecclesiology.

We have understood ourselves as churches, autonomous local congregations, organized on the New Testament plan, bearing it is true some brotherly responsibility to cooperate in proclaiming the gospel with other like churches, but still primarily focused in a local fellowship under the Lordship and authority of Christ. In actual practice, autonomy and the authority of the mores of a community seem to have fragmented us more than the Lordship of Christ has united us. Divine guidance passes through so many layers of autonomy that it eventuates in a religious fellowship scarcely distinguishable from the secular community when grave issues of social ethics confront us. Our churches take on a high degree of coloration from their communities. Compare an urban with a rural church; one in the deep South with one in the Northwest; one which caters to the economically comfortable with one set among laboring people, if you can find the latter. Our chameleon-like adaptation to the local scene is sharp enough to require us to ask ourselves, to what degree does the Lordship of Christ really become effective in our congregational life? To what extent do we manifest the Body of Christ?

These remarks are not meant to impugn the Disciples of Christ. Our heritage has much that is meaningful. All traditions stand under the judgment of God and in such a day, God calls us all to self-examination. We say with others "Let the church be the

church" which implies that it often falls short of its high calling. Whatever we can do to realize our vocation as Christians must be done.

Our problem, it seems to me, lies in our use of freedom. We cherish it as intrinsic to the Christian faith. "For freedom Christ has set us free." Adolescents have trouble handling freedom. It merges into license or degenerates into anarchy. How does one hold fast to continuity, solidarity, tradition, the "treasure" of the gospel in the moment of free, existential decision?

Unless freedom is set within the context of responsible churchmanship it can lead us into "the far country." This I take to be the crucial issue of the Disciples of Christ in our generation. The papers prepared by study groups for recent World Conventions indicate the movement of thought in this direction. In the eight page document prepared for the 1955 Toronto convention on "The Nature of the Church," the word "responsibility" does not appear, and the word "freedom" appears but once. However, the document prepared for the Edinburgh assembly (1960) leads to this conclusion: "The local congregation is a free and autonomous congregation but its freedom is the paradoxical freedom of which Paul speaks—bondage to the will of Christ. It is the relinquishing of libertinism and self-seeking by individuals or groups. It is the essential acceptance of the true reality of Christian freedom, which exists, not for itself but for God. The local congregation is a colony of heaven and its freedom is the covenantal freedom of the people of God, the circumscribed freedom of responsibility. As free, it has the responsibility to seek a spirit of worship and work which enables the members to come to a fuller awareness of their relationship to God and to one another, and to listen to the Church as a whole, i.e., the Church throughout the world, the Church of the past and the present; to listen to and acknowledge gratitude for all Christian tradition but bound to none in strict adherence."

Freedom is but opportunity. We are free to hear God's call . . . and free to ignore it. We are free to worship, and free to sleep. We are free to read all of God's Word and free to read none of it. What we do with our freedom is the mark of our fidelity to God and of our witness among the family of churches.

Our traditional American freedoms of thought, worship and conscience are essentially negative. They thrust back the forces which would coerce man's mind. But they may leave him empty. Freedom may be likened to a building under construction. The concrete pillars are there, rising floor after floor. When the roof

and walls are finished, they will keep the external environment from determining what happens within. But what does happen within? It may be a church . . . or a tavern; an insurance company or a mortuary . . . or nothing at all. In keeping with a sound impulse, we have found a way by which, as much as is humanly possible, the human spirit may be protected against external compulsions and coercions. The structure stands firm against Pope and Council, creed and clergy, liturgy and discipline. But what goes on within? This is the question!

Cuba is free from Batista . . . but only for the bondage of Castro and communism. The Congo is free of white domination . . . but in the bondage of terror in the night, perhaps total anarchy and lawlessness. It is not enough to be free from the enemies of the human spirit; we are made free *for* something and if we do not give ourselves in commitment to the Highest, we shall enslave ourselves to lesser gods. Paul wrote the Corinthians: "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all that I might win the more."

In the 4th Gospel we read: "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man he passes through waterless places seeking rest but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' But when he comes he finds it empty, swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits who are more evil than himself and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

For so many of us, freedom has been little more than the right to differ, to disagree, to dissent. We have labored with vigor to erect walls against any restraint upon the individual conscience. But dissent has a diminishing return. It can become an ingrained habit. Using Jesus's test "you will know them by their fruits," we have to face ourselves with the questions "To what has your freedom led you? What is your ultimate devotion? What do you stand for? What is the product in the fruits of the Spirit?"

In this setting we look at the church. Among the Disciples, the ultimate locus of authority, I am convinced, is the local congregation. It is the final arbiter of disagreement, the real center of faith. I am conscious that this is not our theory. We are "a New Testament people." Christ as He speaks to us in his Word is the final authority. Sadly enough 95% of our people are not familiar enough with the New Testament to recognize the voice of Christ. Our churches divide with amazing ease because we listen to each other and Christ has only one vote among many. The autonomous local

congregation is not a strong enough center of faith to hold us steady in the midst of the centrifugal social forces of our time. We are the congregation . . . but we are in deep need of a search for the Body, the Body of Christ.

What we lack most is religion! We believe, but what do we believe? Do we believe in stewardship? (Have you checked the national statistics?) Do we believe in evangelism? (Have you noted our rate of growth?) Do we believe in brotherhood, when it implies racial desegregation? Or when it means bringing men into our church across the gulfs separating social and economic groupings? Or have we spent our moral in dissenting from Nicea and Chalcedon, from Luther and Calvin, from presbytery and episcopacy? Among conservative laymen, note the increasing dissent from pronouncements of conventions and a growing unwillingness to submit economic, political and social practices to the judgment of God's Word.

Our early days were filled with the spirit of rebellion against ecclesiastical tyranny. What I am going to say is no defense of tyranny. But must our choice be ecclesiastical anarchy? What gain is it to throw off the straight-jacket of theological tyranny if we emerge theologically naked and thus vulnerable to every wandering virus of cult and fad?

We are "the Great Dissenters." I offer no dissent to dissent. This is the indispensable privilege of the free man, the free society, the free conscience. But one gets into habits. There is nothing specifically Christian in dissent. Jesus did not call his disciples to dissent! They were not against something, they were for something!

Here is a familiar stereotype: every official board I have had had its dissenter. Whatever was raised was called into question. He found as many problems as possible! There really is such a thing as obstructionism. There is such a thing as having leaned backward so long that one cannot move forward.

Here is the anti-Catholic. He has made a profession of opposing the Pope. His religious virtues are the opposites of the Catholic's virtue. The Catholic goes to church. He expresses his religion by declining to go to church . . . and despises the Catholic because he is under the compulsion of conscience. He ridicules the Catholic for wearing the ashes of Lent . . . but upon his whole life there is no mark of sacrifice. He laughs at the Novena, transubstantiation, the ceremonies of the devout . . . but he never enters significantly into the presence of God, he never

lets himself become aware of the judgment of the eternal upon his life, be blinds himself to the lure of the highest.

Is the mark of the Christian dissent to all these things? Then let me introduce you to one who excels, Nikita Khrushchev! He too hates ecclesiastical tyranny . . . but he imposes another tyranny in its place. Dissent has had a noble place in the history of man's struggle for freedom in all the areas of life. I would not silence it, nor stifle it. Indeed, I could not. What I hope to see happen is for the full thrust of our communal life to begin moving toward something, not away from something; it is not enough to be emptied of demons, we must be filled with the Spirit. Freedom is always *for* some purpose and it is our mission today to find that purpose.

We have freed ourselves from creedal conformity as a test of fellowship. We have also pretty well freed ourselves from any kind of systematic, ordered thinking about the Christian life and the moral imperative. I was amused at the reaction of my congregation to the insertion of an Affirmation of Faith in our order of worship. One of these (and they are changed each week) was a statement on the church. It was a modest statement, one written for laymen. Yet one soul, who wished to remain anonymous, sent me the Sunday bulletin with line after line marked out, leaving only the words "The Body of Christ." This was all we needed, he remarked. Yet I would be confident that if he were asked (or any average layman asked) to say what he meant by the Body of Christ, his words would be exhausted in a sentence or two.

I recall a discussion held at a time Texas was being asked to ponder in each local church the matter of a delegate state convention. In one group, we talked at great length of the need for a more responsible corporate life, of our inability really to say anything as a denominational group, of the safe-guard that the conventions would remain mass conventions, open to all, and that only the vote would be reserved to delegates. One woman, a life-long Disciple, a typical, ardent, Disciple-or-nothing soul concluded: "I don't like it. I want to vote." A few months later, the convention was held in her home city, an open convention, open to all to vote. She did not trouble to travel the 2 or 3 miles to cast a vote, pro or con. She had exhausted her energy, her fervor, in dissent. She did not want anyone to forbid her to vote; but she forbade herself. Ecclesiastical tyranny and ecclesiastical anarchy seem to produce about the same fruit.

We have denied the external compulsions of faith, but we have not succeeded very well in internalizing them. The solid convictions

we have produced in our churches has often been faddist (so that we lead the pack after every novelty); or negative (as with the anti-Catholic); and when we face the challenge of social morality, as with the race problem, we find ourselves almost helpless. The church has little authority in the hearts of its people. Their center of gravity is in the society about them. They are so accustomed to dissent, to believing that the voice of the people is the voice of God, that they have no hesitancy in overriding any prophetic voice. The free churches find it very difficult to be the Body of Christ, to be an instrument of reconciliation and redemption, in the midst of grave social issues because of our low concept of the church.

We were dissenters to the right of Councils, Bishops, Assemblies or Presbyteries to deliberate and speak on the issues of the Christian life. Our history is full of controversy over every step which would enlarge the scope of the church. In spite of our plea for unity, we have divided and continue to divide. While instrumental music in worship was the occasion of our first major schism, the whole philosophy of the church was really at stake, for the dissenting Church of Christ has remained anti-connectional, rigidly independent and autonomous in its congregational life. To all effects we have divided again over the means of fulfilling our missionary obligation. In all of this, the spirit of dissent, even of rancor or censoriousness, has been all too evident.

We have rejected the disciplines of the Christian life. We require nothing, literally nothing, of our people except a formal, upnexamined public statement of faith in Jesus Christ and baptism. We have made a virtue of the open invitation. In the light of the results, one is entitled to ask some questions about it. Are we really serving men's spiritual needs when we offer them church membership which is uninformed or ill-informed, committed to nothing very much, and which allows them to sink into anonymity the next Sunday, to remain there for 30 or 40 years? No wonder they look at us in surprise and distaste when the financial canvas comes! It is the bland assumption of the church's leaders that its members have some basic loyalties, that they stand for something, believe in something, that they are committed to Christ and His Kingdom. It is not wise to assume too much. As like as not, they drifted into your church with a good friend, they found the fellowship congenial, they were spurred by the American image of the good citizen to propel themselves into every worthy civic activity . . . and now here you are, expecting them to *do* something about it! How would you feel if you visited some luncheon club with a friend

where you found sociable neighbors, where all was sweetness and light, where good food and good fun combined, and you decided to join this group . . . and then discovered, that all unknown to you, it was expected of you that a number of unpleasant burdens would now be assumed by you? "Tuesday mornings you will drive the garbage truck on the 4 a.m. pickup and Saturday afternoons you will take the Cub Scouts on rowing parties." You hadn't planned anything like that! Precisely what is it that the new member of one of our churches can be expected to do? To what has he committed himself? This is the inevitable end product of churches which, while they have been against tyranny, interference, overlordship, have let the tide of devotion ebb away.

It is not my intention to suggest that we set out on the wrong path 150 years ago. I treasure freedom as indispensable to the life of the spirit. Our witness to this generation, perhaps our word to the ecumenical movement is "Live as free men." My concern is that my church and yours shall find an end to dissent for its own sake and turn the spiritual energies which can emerge in a dynamic freedom to the mission to which we have been called. We must demonstrate in our churches the levels of devotion to whcih the human spirit can rise. We have had enough of minimums; let us have a faith of maximums.

This means the achieving of Christian responsibility, of using our God-given freedoms *for* high purposes. What is responsibility —except the ability to respond? In the whole created order, we see the recurring pattern of stimulus/response. The branch responds to the force of the wind. The stone warms in the rays of the sun. The heavenly bodies yield to the laws of motion. All of this is perfectly and marvelously mechanical. This is the orderliness of the universe—response to stimuli.

Human responsibility, while similar, is of a different order. It is the ability to respond appropriately to value—to moral challenge. God calls us: "Choose this day whom you will serve." "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me." In Christ, encounter the God whose service is perfect freedom! Theoretically, the Disciples of Christ set no limit upon your right and privilege of total commitment. What no man or human authority can demand of me, I can demand of myself—or more properly, in creative freedom I can give the total response of my heart to the total demand of God. This is not the violation of freedom, but its fulfillment.

Dr. Robert W. Spike, writing in "Christianity and Crisis" (Feb. 6, 1961) and referring to the new book, "Rabbit, Run," says: "Here is freedom, that ancient battle cry of left-wing Protestantism, seen to be a meaningless category when there is no felt need to fill it with anything. Our forefathers valued freedom because they had a *call to be something under God.* When there is no call, there can only be escape."

Is there no call? Is God's voice stilled? Have we exhausted the meaning of being free men in Christ by thumbing our noses at ecclesiastical overlords? Is dissent enough? Our freedom is *for* something—nothing less than release from bondage to self and sin, to petty idolatries and partial loyalties, into the joyful service of Him who is Lord and Christ.

The Protestant concept of the church should, in theory, produce the fruits of the Spirit in abundance, for it releases the spirit of man from bondage enabling him to respond creatively to the call of God upon his life. History demonstrates the possibilities of this. Be it Amos, or Paul, or Luther, or Campbell, or Martin Luther King or E. Stanley Jones, there is a kind of validity in the immediacy of Christian experience which commends itself to us and cannot be ignored.

But our stewardship of freedom must be called in question. It is my own judgment that the structure of the free church confronts us with existential decisions which may be infinitely rewarding; but also with possibilities of failure which take us to the edge of the abyss—the abyss of disloyalty to our Lord, of Biblical illiteracy, of smug satisfaction with our formal relationships to the church, of moral irrelevancy in the midst of crisis, of half-hearted stewardship, of self-righteous illusions, of emptiness. I am not concerned with making comparisons between Protestants and Catholics; between Disciples of Christ and other religious bodies; between congregations or between believers. The only concern is with the quality of the response we now make in freedom to the God who has called us. "You will know them by their fruits." Whatever the theologians do with the pragmatic test, it will remain in circulation in the world at large and in the conscience of every Christian.

I am convinced that the church of our time, the church which I serve and to which I belong; the church you one day will serve, the church of which you are now a part . . . these churches, this church are today at one of the great turning points of Christian history. Battered from without by secular philosophies, challenged by the rising tide of nationalistic religions, weakened within by the disillusionment rising in the failure of too facile solutions to social problems, summoned to ethical courage and commitment, the church must find renewal or sink into the inconsequential. As one of the tradition of the Disciples of Christ, let us put it this way; We must realize the fullness of the nature of the church within the context of freedom. And the road out of the abyss is labeled "Responsible Churchmanship."

Freedom and responsibility are twins and you can have no more of one than you take of the other. To the degree that a man's actions rise out of necessity, we hold him guiltless morally. If

someone steals my car and runs over a child and damages another car, I may be legally liable, but the community holds me innocent. I am responsible only to the degree that I have actually been free. But he who is free and eschews responsibility is yielding himself to bondage. The German people after World War I could not bring themselves to face the hard decisions and sacrifices required for economic and political stability. For the sake (as they thought) of security, they yielded their political freedom to Hitler in return for a mess of pottage. In our freedom from the disciplines of the church, we have enslaved ourselves to Biblical illiteracy. Free from liturgy and rite, we worshiped at the idol of emptiness. Refugees from ecclesiastical tyranny, we have struck off the bonds but to become servants of ecclesiastical anarchy is no gain. Freedom is only opportunity. Responsibility is the joyful response to opportunity to enter into fellowship with the living God.

Dr. Minear in his book, "Images of the Church in the New Testament" (Westminster), has laid the challenge before us. Perhaps it will be more meaningful in that he speaks from the tradition of the free church. His thoughtful analysis of the images of the church in the New Testament presents us with the opportunity of beginning all over again in the attempt of the church to find self-recognition. For centuries we have been frozen in a deadlock with the apostolic succession and believer's baptism seemingly impassable barriers except by the sacrifice of convictions. (Note that the issue is not immersion vs. sprinkling or affusion, but the baptism of the believer vs. infant baptism. This is at the very heart of our understanding of the church as a voluntary association of those who have been brought together by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.)

Dr. Minear's challenge is in these words: "It is the suspicions that the high churches have of the low, often quite justified, that impels them to defend the ontological realism of the body of Christ and therefore to maintain as essential the inherited ministerial orders, including episcopal succession. These suspicions might be undermined to the extent that the low churches actually adopted as their dominant ecclesiology *the full height of the New Testament images.* On the other side, the suspicions, equally justified, that the low churches have of the high prompt them to defend the metaphorical character of the body of Christ and, accordingly, to treat as temporary and limited the necessity of ministerial orders. These suspicions would be undermined to the extent that the high churches should actually appropriate the full lowliness of the New Testament

images. And if mutual suspicions were undermined by a mutual appreciation of the height and depth of Christ's ministry through the church, these alienated churches might be reconciled . . . it was initially the reality of reconciliation that produced the images and made them vehicles of God's work." (264)

I have not read the responses of the varying churchly traditions to Dr. Minear's new book, but I am ready and willing . . . if not able; and I should like to propose that the Disciples of Christ set themselves to inquire what is "the full height of the New Testament images." I am not so hopeful that I can suppose this new approach will lead to the prompt unification of the church; but I am not ready to close any door, and above all, I am convinced that we are responsible under God to enter into any new understanding of the church which may open to us. This has been a fundamental concern of mine over several years . . . that the Disciples of Christ should seek out of maximum in Biblical insights rather than settling down with or riding along with the shallow, surface positions we have held. If there be any more to our faith, let us have it! If there be deeper levels of devotions, let us walk in them! If the veil of mystery between us and our Lord can be lifted ever so much, let it be done.

Let us now examine in some detail the "images" which have been suggested by Dr. Minear:

1. The People of God. (Such as a chosen race, a holy nation, twelve tribes, remnant, flock, priesthood).

In some respects, this image should hold unusual meaning for the Disciples, for we have seen ourselves as a "movement," a "peculiar people." We have believed ourselves to be a people responding to a particular call from God—to restore the broken unity of the church. One finds this theme in Disciples preaching, especially within the last fifteen years.

Yet we have forbidden ourselves to know the "full height" of this image by our zealous concentration upon being a "New Testament church." In all honesty we have not really understood the church to exist before the day of Pentecost. In the Toronto paper we read; "The Church, in the New Testament meaning of the term, could not have begun prior to the resurrection of Christ, and to the kerygma based upon the resurrection. This is not to deny either the existence of a 'people of God' in some sense, at an earlier time, or the eternal purpose of God for human redemption. But the initiating of a new covenant; the new relation to God, based upon faith, not racial descent or works; and most significant of all,

the entirely new phenomenon of men responding to God's redemptive work within human history—these sufficiently indicate the newness of the Church." We have seen the Old Testament as the preface of a book, containing routine acknowledgements to sources and dear friends of the author, but none the less, pages which could be skipped by the busy reader who must plunge into the heart of the matter.

The Toronto report also states that "the New Testament also makes it plain that, in the initial period of the Church's life, God graciously granted to men the leading of his Holy Spirit, not only for the directing of their lives, but to reveal to them the nature of the Church. . . ." This certainly implies some diminution of divie guidance in Old Testament days as well as in the present hour.

Polemics played their part in this. The argument for believer's baptism hung in part upon whether circumcision was the archetype of this rite of initiation. Why use an image which might raise this question or reinforce the position of the pedobaptists if others were available? Thus Pentecost has been seen as the "birthday of the church" and the new era has been so new as to have no visible roots in the past activity of God. Thus we have forbidden ourselves to know the full height of the image of "the people of God."

We might have avoided some of our excesses in radical individualism if we had been more aware of the interdependence which is a mark of the social group.

2. The New Creation (Such as first fruits, the new humanity, the last Adam, the Kingdom of God, God's glory, light, life).

In my judgment, this conception is less congenial to the Disciples. While we might not quarrel with it in theory, it may be doubted that this concept has been in the forefront of our thought and life. Perhaps we were conditioned by the historical setting in which the Disciples of Christ came into being. Our forefathers in the early 19th Century were confronted by a rigid Calvinism. It sought to secure and defend the sovereignty of God by ascribing all glory, power and honor to Him. Conversion was decidedly a matter of "new creation" with the initiative all in the hands of God. "Irresistible grace" was contented against by the early Disciples. The result of this controversy was that the Disciples came to emphasize the response made by man to God's gracious invitation. Without realizing it perhaps, we became quite "man-centered" in our preaching and church life. In contrast to the Calvinist who could only wait for God's act, we emphasized man's responsibility to hear the word of God and act upon it. While it was necessary

to correct this one-sided theological position, it is unfortunate that the center of attention has remained so exclusively on man himself and what he does with the religious impulse.

This distortion has made it easier for our people to slip into a simple moralism. Much of our preaching could be summarized as "try, try again" and among laymen, the Christian religon is still commonly thought to be obedience to the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. "The Kingdom of God" is the only image in this series which is commonly heard among us and this concept is often an exceedingly shallow one in which we are exhorted to hurry up and "build the Kingdom." We are not at home in my judgment with themes such as "Glory, light, name, life." The emphasis upon the rational in religion has left us suspicious of the mystical. We have, perhaps, denied ourselves some deeper insight into our faith because of this limitation.

It could be said in fairness that the Christian churches have been captured largely by "the institutional mind." The American gift for organizing and promoting has been more than enthusiastically received by the church. The evangelistic thrust of the church has often been indistinguishable from a membership drive of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. Americans are delighted to join and support anything which generally promises uplift and hope for the future. A careful study of what is said in visitation evangelism programs would probably demonstrate a highly "man-centered" approach to the church.

Thus the image of "the new creation" stands as a challenge and an invitation to the Disciples of Christ. We deeply need to have an openness to God's present activity. This clearly implies further exploration of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as well as penetration into this understanding of the church as the new creation.

3. The Fellowship of Faith (Such as the faithful, the justified, followers, disciples, slaves, sons of God, brotherhood).

Here we are surely at home for this is probably the most characteristic phrase for our Disciple understanding of the church. We recall immediately Dr. Morrison's Beecher lectures, "What is Christianity?" We see ourselves as "the gathered people," "the Democracy of God." We know ourselves to be the Sons of God . . . but do we understand ourselves to be His slaves? The uniqueness of Jesus lay in the fact that he was both Lord and Slave. We have emphasized the joys of fellowship but not its demands. The fellowship has not been disciplined by obedience to that which

towers over the mores of the community. I can give what no human being has a right to demand of me. It should be possible for a "fellowship of faith" to guard the freedom of the individual conscience and at the same time to plant within the human heart the impulse to give a total loyalty to God and his claim.

4. The Body of Christ (such as the body of life, members of Christ, spiritual body, head of cosmic spirits, the fulness of God).

This image, which has the strongest biblical ground, is certainly that found most frequently in contemporary discussions of the church. Is it metaphor, "mere metaphor," or is it ontological in its deeper meaning? Like most Disciples, I do not find myself able to offer a clear answer to this question. Our non-theological background has left us less than adequate when ontological questions are raised. In general, we have taken the position that Christianity is a reasonable religion and that the Bible can be taken in its simple, matter-of-fact meanings. Most of us would find it impossible to think of the church as "the extension of the Incarnation."

It might be said that our complacency in thinking of Christianity as "reasonable" may be subject to searching criticism today. The development of depth psychology has indicated that very few things are "simple and matter-of-fact." With the existential philosophers and theologians galloping in one direction and the logical positivists and the analytic philosophers in the other direction, "the simple matter-of-factness" of Disciples now stands under a double challenge. I find myself unable to answer the question Dr. Minear has raised but conscious of the need for deep searching in this field of understanding by our people.

The possibility of this study of the "images" as a ground upon which churches may draw closer to one another is suggested in this beautiful passage I shall quote from Dr. Minear's book:

"First of all, the New Testament conception of the church is higher than any conception held by the so-called high churches. As evidence for this statement, I submit simply the full meaning of the four master images: the people of God, the new creation, the fellowship in faith, the body of Christ. In context these images point to a reality which is prexistent and postexistent, which transcends the boundaries of time and space, of present and future, of life and death. This reality is as high as the Most High God who lives within it and moves through it to accomplish His eternal purpose. It is as high as the living Lord in whom and from whom the church receives the fullness of God's life and glory. It is as

high as the Holy Spirit who leads the church into all truth and sanctifies it with His gifts. It is as high as the new humanity, as the resurrection-body of Christ, as the Holy City, which comes down out of heaven. The dimension of height, suggested but not exhausted by these images, dwarfs to hill-like proportions the highest of high churches. . . .

"Second, the New Testament conception of the church is lower than any conception firmly believed and practiced by any low church. The evidence is amply provided by the same master images. The height of the people of God is accomplished by the depth of His condescension in love for those who are not His people. The new creation in its greatest power is introduced by a Messiah who humbled Himself, who descended into hell, who took captivity captive by His death on a cross. The fellowship in faith is created by a God who in faithfulness to His promises suffered in man's suffering and thus created His people as a fellowship in faith, which by its suffering witnesses to the redemption of a suffering world. The body of Christ is a broken body, which produces by its very brokenness the unification of all things. Consequently, the reality of the church is slavery and servitude to him and this slavery is a mission to the lowest of men because it is a promise to them that love never fails. The church becomes the church through dying in the body of Christ to the law, to self, to sin, and to death. The true church is in actuality a cross-bearing Man. But can any of our churches think of themselves as being so low as this? By the definition of lowliness given to the church by its Servant, our most democratic pretensions seem shallow indeed. Our conception of high church has no universality, our conception of low church has no redemptive power. The New Testament images have both because they perceive in Jesus Christ the glory of God in his condescension to be wounded for our transgressions. It is His glory that provides the ontological ground of all the images of the church."

In the light of these comments, we turn now to certain practical suggestions of the means by which the Disciples of Christ can use their freedom to fulfill their destiny as the church.

1. Exploration into responsible churchmanship.

If it is true that in the past we have abused the freedom which is ours, we can now use that freedom to achieve the instrumentalities of responsible life in the church and among the churches. Responsibility can become a habit and it must start at the level of congregational life.

Let it begin with the ministers. We Disciple ministers are an unbridled lot! If our ministry is not taken seriously by those with "higher" concepts of church orders, it must be admitted that we have not enhanced the meaning of this calling by irresponsible acts and attitudes, both among laymen and the professional workers. Freed as we are from clerical supervision, we have not always sought or at least heeded the guidance of the Spirit.

Consider the prima donna who has to have his own way in everything; the exhibitionist who appears to use his church as a stepping stone into something better; the "one-man-show" whose congregation is only a sounding board for his voice, who overrides all democratic processes; the "man on the make" manipulating events for his self-aggrandizement; the "independent" who severs the ties that should bind him and his church to the wider fellowship of faith. If our ministry is not taken as seriously by others or by ourselves, as we might wish, it is, in part certainly, because we have not used our freedom to the highest ends.

As a democratic people, we should be specialists in the democratic process. Yet no "man from Mars" would ever select us if he wanted to know how democracy works. Most of our churches are led by small cliques, often it is true, forced into that role by the disinterest of the average man. Responsible churchmanship begins with the relation of the individual Christian to his fellow-churchman, to his minister, to governing bodies and to the universal church. No one is going to stop us if we seek to demonstrate the dynamics of a free faith within the context of responsibility to one another and to God.

2. We must see that the church is the creation of God and not merely the product of our human engineering. We have become experts in the latter. We know how to bring a church into being. One studies the movements of populations, projections of the telephone company or the public schools, the location of new freeways, etc. We know how to raise the money and gather the people. We engineer the event. God is somehow able to work in us and through us in spite of our egocentric blindness but the church remains as our creation, our plaything, in our own thought. Like the P.T.A. and the civic club, we brought it into being and we know what keeps it going—our money, our time, our energies.

The new creation comes from God. It comes down to "grasp" us, it calls us, it claims us; through it we enter into the saving knowledge of God. The church is not "ours," it is the Body of Christ.

Dr. Halford Luccock has written about the Texas rancher, Shanghai Pierce, who had a 200,000 acre ranch near Cuero, Texas. For the use of "wetbacks" and other farm labor, he erected a simple white chapel on his land. One day a visitor noted the church and asked him, "Do you belong to that church?" Shanghai's answer was as profane as the idea itself, "Hell, no! The church belongs to me!" It is altogether too easy to see the church as "ours," the product of our time, our energy, our foresight, our money, our professional skill.

3. We must see the wholeness of the church rather than merely its local manifestation. The process of receiving members into the church gives us an opportunity of widening vision. When the Board of Trustees of the United Christian Missionary Society proposed an "ecumenical membership" for the mission fields, some persons thought of it as an inferior, limited membership. There were some who were surprised to find many who would cherish ecumenical membership over that within any single tradition.

If we believe that the church is "constitutionally one," that conviction should be reflected in the act of reception into the church. When one receives a new member, the words of welcome can open doors of understanding into the rich images of the church rather than just a local club which has won a competition with its neighbors.

I would hope that "Images of the Church" may be read widely among us, serving as the foundation of many a series of sermons on the church.

There is evidence that more responsible practices are arising among our churches in regard to preparation for church membership. I do not refer to the "pastor's class" for children but to classes of preparation for adults. We have been experimenting with efforts to bring adult prospects through such a series of such encounters with the minister *prior* to accepting them as members.

There is also some evidence of a development of a sense of discipline among our people. This must be a voluntary discipline rather in nature of our fellowship. It does, however, offer possibilities for the development of groups within the local congregation who dedicate themselves to a genuine search for the will of God and its relevance to the everyday affairs of this world.

We must set ourselves to the hard task of understanding, and making coherent and intelligible the experience in which we have been called to be Christians. This is the theological endeavor, in

which we are not skilled. It is secondary, for without the experience of God in Christ, there is nothing to study.

Signs of this are everywhere. The eagerness with which such opportunities are met speaks of a felt need. The study papers of the World Conventions, those of the Panel of Scholars, the series now proceeding on worship, the Conversations on Theology and Ethics, all these meet with a ready response. When the World Convention Executive Committee determined to set up 25 study groups in the United States in preparation for the Puerto Rican Convention, as against a much smaller number in 1955, some were doubtful—but every invitation has been accepted and our people soon will again set themselves to a search for consensus, and the levels deepen year by year.

Local churches are turning to genuine study in a way not imaginable fifteen or twenty years ago. To mention just one experiment, the Country Club Christian church is presently engaged in a "School of Christian Enrichment." This is similar to the leadership training courses which have been offered in churches for many years, but with these exceptions: An enrollment fee of $1.00 is charged all except children. The classes are limited to 25 and applicants are refused when this number is reached. Each person is required to have a textbook and to read it. The discussion method is used as largely as is possible given the content. The courses also range widely in their concern dealing less with methodology than with questions of social ethics, theology, the fine arts, church history, Christian literature, etc. Enrolling more than 300 persons, this has now become a permanent part of our program.

5. We can support the move to Restructure our Brotherhood which has already been authorized by the International Convention. It grows out of this same kind of concern. Our forefathers were so fearful of overlordship that they and we denied ourselves the very means of expressing the full height of the image of the church. We have made a virtue of weakness. Necessity has forced us to develop "agencies" through which the churches could do their work. But it has been done reluctantly, backhandedly. We do not have channels of responsible church life except as they have been developing sporadically here and there. Our hope for gain here is limited for a channel has to have something to carry, the devotion of a united people, but it has to be done if we are to find the full meaning of the church and I hope it will be done with dispatch. I suppose that only a parish minister can be conscious of the manifold confusion of our connectional life with state and national

loyalties, private corporations galore set up to do the work of the church and the local congregation a kind of "sitting duck" for the promotional man. This is a limited hope, but a valid one.

6. In current ecumenical conversations, we can defend and fill with meaning the concept of "believer's baptism." Along with the apostolic succession, this stands as one of the great gulfs between traditions. I think we have something to say which we have not found a convincing way to say.

At stake is the creativity of our faith. Believer's baptism is the expression of mature decision. The child who is born into the tradition, baptized into the church at infancy and confirmed in early adolescence, seldom really makes a decision, unless it be a negative one. He is given the content of the faith, the dogma, the creed, on a silver platter. . . . and nothing which comes on a silver platter ever means quite as much as that which we have won for ourselves.

It seems to me that it violates the integrity of the personality to force mature religious convictions upon the immature. . . . of whatever age. Of what value is it to proclaim that one believes in the virgin birth, the resurrection of the body, the descent into hell, everlasting punishment, or any other idea if one really suspects that it is not true? Unless belief can be integrated into personality, it remains impotent. . . . and gives some basis to the suspicion that religion is mere wishful thinking.

The Child Evangelization movement is a case in point. These earnest people take children of 5, 6 or 7 years of age and terrify them with pictures of hell fire in order to wring from them a "confession" of faith. I cannot believe that to say "I believe in God" means anything unless one really does and unless he has sufficient knowledge both of life and his own needs and the Biblical answer to relate the two significantly.

We represent a creative faith which does not coerce the mind into official positions just because they are centuries old. Jesus did not come with an official dogma. He loved men into redemption. As Dr. Bertocci has written: "It is this Jesus who saw in each person the child of God. Who lived conscientiously, but humbly and compassionately, among his fellow men, who accepted at their hands unearned ingratitude, hatred, and even contemptuous mocking and yet forgave them; it is the Jesus who, as Gethsemane showed, grew in his ennobling, tragic sense of what it means to be the loving Father of men, and then died without self-pity for their

sakes—it is this Jesus who can give me some sense of what it would mean for God to walk among men."

God does not overpower the intellectual faculties of man. That would be the way of catastrophic miracle. Jesus faced that and turned from it in the temptation. God approaches man in forgiving love in which the personality of man is respected and his freedom is preserved. It would be an irony if we who began as legalists and moralists should end as the defenders of creativity. . . . but it would be a good switch!

7. We must seek the maximum expression of our commitment in every area of communal life, rather than the minimum. This would include the Lord's Table, baptism, ordination, worship, missions and the devotional life. Too easily we become dilettantes, dabblers, triflers, satisfied with going through the motions, giving God a tip of the hat. We want to be disciples without discipline, a commitment without courage, religion with the least trouble.

The dilettante wants the appearance of religion but he has no genuine interest in God's will. He is not hard to identify. Suppose that you are a teacher of mathematics and that a student comes to you and says, "I'd like for you to teach me a few things about mathematics. I'd like to know what is two times two, seven times seven and ten times ten; and then give me three or four formulas of algebra, will you?" And you say, "What in the world do you want these for?" And he says, "Well, I am going to join a scientific fraternity and I'd like for them to think I know a little bit about mathematics." No mathematics teacher could take this very seriously for this man is not going to go anyplace in math, is he?

Here is a fisherman. We see him going out the back door to get into his car with his fishing rig and we notice that he has no bait. We call to him, "You forgot your worms or your flies," and he says, "Oh, it doesn't matter. I just like to go out and throw the hook in the water every now and then. When I was a boy I learned to fish and the habit just stayed with me. Every now and then I go throw a hook in the water for 10 minutes or so and then come home." No fisherman behaves like this! Such a person doesn't exist, does he? Except that there is many a person who is riding on childhood habits, sitting in the back pews, drifting along within the circle of the church while his heart is really somewhere else.

Here is a golfer who says to his boss, "Can I have ten minutes off this afternoon? I'd like to play golf." The boss says, "Ten minutes! You can't play golf in ten minutes." He says, "Oh, I

just like to knock the ball around a little, play a couple of holes." A couple of holes! So we watch him on the golf course where he takes a swing at the ball and doesn't even hit it toward the green. We say, "What are you doing?" He says, "It doesn't matter where you hit it as long as you are sincere. You see, I hit it hard. The fact that I'm not knocking it anywhere in particular doesn't matter. I am sincere about it." This man doesn't exist either but if he did, we would call him a dilettante.

The church today is distressed and weakened by these searches for a minimum religion. This is essentially and undisciplined, uncommitted faith. It is possible to live altogether too long in one of our churches without being challenged to return to reality. In the free church, one can live at the minimum or at the maximum. Happily, there is nothing which forbids anyone of us to choose the maximum for himself. As they used to say, "It doesn't take much of a man to be a Christian but it takes all of him there is." Our preaching should stimulate our people to be as much of a Christian as one can be.

8. We need fresh, vigorous, committed young lives who are conscious of their freedom and willing to discipline it to a high calling. We need, above all, a recrudescence of religion in our churches, of people whose lives are filled with the joy of the Lord because they have been in his presence.

We need to reawaken to the privilege of freedom in Christ. We need to stimulate the impulse to explore our faith to the very depths of our understanding. We need a hunger for the highest. We need to discover that there is, after all, "gold on the old home place." In the spirit of "Acres of Diamonds" we need to return to a Biblical faith to rediscover its relevance to the total experience of man.

A Study Document

STRATEGY OF ECUMENICAL CONCERNS

Division of World Mission
The United Christian Missionary Society

When the Strategy of World Mission was being created it was stated again and again that it be an "open ended strategy," that from time to time new elements would be added to bring it up to date and enable the Division of World Mission to meet the issues of the day. A world mission plan that crystalizes at any particular stage soon becomes obsolete. The Strategy of World Mission of The United Christian Missionary Society must be a growing, creative one.

We were so concerned with the pressures of the immediate problems confronting us in working out the strategy (which has now become administrative policy of the Division of World Mission of The United Christian Missionary Society) that we did not deal with the issues of ecumenical concern which were developing rapidly during this period. The ecumenical movement is representative of the creative spirit of God working within the churches all over the world. There is a growing awareness among the churches of the sin of exclusiveness and a consciousness of the oneness of Christians under the Lordship of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Some of us have come a long way in arriving at our common concern for the extension of the Kingdom of God. We can trace our religious experience back to the frontier days of the expansion of the church. We were preached to and taught the exclusive denominational concept of truth. In those days it was believed that the church to which one belonged had all of the truth and it was that church that could redeem and save the world. Many of us were unhappy and troubled. We knew deep in our hearts that no one church had the whole truth. We were aware and proud of the contribution our church was making to the truth of God but we could not believe sincerely that we had it all.

The first voice to be raised in protest about this situation was that of the missionary. Missionaries, surrounded by widespread paganism, began to be troubled at the smallness of their contribution in exclusiveness against the vastness of need. They began to realize that the Christ they represented was one and they re-

belled against the separatist approach to him when confronted by this vast need.

They began to take very cautious steps in trying to work together. They were careful to cooperate in those things that did not have doctrinal commitments or express theological positions. They began to cooperate where they could by meeting vast and tragic human need in such institutions as hospitals, schools, social work, publishing houses, etc. Then they took another cautious step. They established what we now know as comity. Comity meant the allocation of certain areas for the work of a mission and by agreement no other mission worked in that area. This was a good step. The early missionary did not understand nor envisage the implications of it. It was good in that it brought the gospel of Christ within a single denominational presentation and enabled the spread of the gospel in a larger geographical area. However, it perpetuated the evils of denominationalism. It created denominational cells everywhere and did not contribute to the larger unity of Christ's gospel for his world. This, too, served to awaken the conscience of missionaries who began to see that if they could agree within this phase of Christian cooperation it was a tacit admission that no single denomination had the exclusive right to the whole truth of God.

In cooperative enterprises such as schools and hospitals, missionaries working together found that the things in which they agreed were more significant and of greater importance than the things in which they disagreed. Thus in the light of their cooperation their differences began to fade and they found new courage and hope in the ultimate oneness of their common task.

Another cautious step which had implications for the ultimate working together of the denominations was the establishment of Union Seminaries. Any group of churches that would make the momentous decision of training their ministers together would have to face in the long run the implications of their common cause in Christ.

We do not have time in this statement to trace in detail the steps of ever increasing cooperation and common concern which developed the International Missionary Council, and National Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches but for one whose life span has been lived in this entire development there was growing and inspiring concern for the need of our doing Christ's work together.

We have moved from the old era of individualism into the new era of ecumenical concern. Within the world Christian community today the convicition is deeply held that in our time the spirit of God is moving among us to bring us into a new experience of common purpose and unity. The ecumenical agencies which we have created reflect this. For example, the one theological statement required of a church body seeking membership in the National Council of Churches is: "Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior." In the World Council of Churches there is the change of one word: "Jesus Christ as God and Savior."

Behind these confessions lie a basic assumption that is of tremendous significance for us today and that is that the churches which are willing to make this confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior have already taken a common position in unity in Jesus Christ. By taking this step there is a subtle but very real assumption that they should and must come together to discuss and share their traditions and convictions in anticipation of their ultimate unity. This is an assumption that they are already within the one household of faith.

Our churches must face the alternatives of continuing in this pattern of mutuality which forms the basis of our future unity or be content with neighborly cooperation that is to their advantage but which necessitates no commitment to the future. It is our conviction that the first course is the only Christian course left to us. This does not mean that we ignore the existence and value of our confessional traditions. This would not mean either that we move into organic union structures immediately. It would, however, force us as a matter of policy to state as churches that we would prefer to participate in a united Christian witness rather than a denominational one. This would imply that we would seek to enlarge those areas of our witness which we share across denominational lines. It would involve us constantly in asserting our oneness in Christ as a great and more enduring reality than our divisions. It places us in a common framework implying that the priority and reality of the universal church should take precedence over our denominational structures.

If we are willing to move beyond the position that the church to which we belong is the one true church then we must thoughtfully consider the matter of its particular witness. This witness must be evaluated in the light of the purpose of God for our time which surely includes the necessity of making common cause in the presentation of his redemptive gospel. We should not co-

operate solely because we can do things together more effectively, that it is less expensive, that it is good business, because if we do we have denied the basic assumption that pulls us together. We must begin with the conviction that we have sinned against God in our separateness. We must reexamine our confessional patterns in order that we yield to the will of God which is for the oneness of his people.

We are not attempting to ignore the difficulties inherent in this proposition. We believe we have to work with what we have but we certainly do not think any expedient that fails to reach into the deeper concerns of God's purpose for us is adequate. The younger churches are very impatient with the divisions of western confessionalism. They feel that they did not have a part in the early divisions of Christianity or in its later ones. They do not believe it necessary that there be reproduced throughout the world the multiple confessional images of the churches of the west. Our experience over the past twenty years in intimate contact with these younger churches has made us very much aware of their conviction that division is sin and that they are called of God to unite. An Indian Christian recently stated that he thought it was paradoxical that his church under the present divided situation had more intimate relations with the American denomination that created it than he had with a group of Indian Christians twenty miles away created by another confession.

What this concern reflects is a need for our getting together beginning where we are and starting to plan on a broad ecumenical basis for world witness. We cannot wait to begin ecumenical work until we have manipulated all of the denominational machinery for entering into unity. We must find immediately the basis for a world-wide mission which will enable us to share our Christ without reservation.

The Division of World Mission is attempting to face this problem of ecumenical thrust with adequate strategy and policy. The Disciples of Christ are heavily involved in cooperative enterprises across the world. Just a listing of various involvements will give some idea of the extent of our participation in this creative movement. In order that this may be more meaningful we are listing in a separate exhibit (Exhibit A) the participation of the Division of World Mission of The United Christian Missionary Society in cooperative and ecumenical projects across the world. This shows a considerable and a very challenging record through the years.

It is evident that the world cannot be won to Christ by a segment of the church. The task is too great, the time is too short. The Disciples of Christ who have expressed cooperation and unity as two of the basic reasons for its existence must be in the forefront of these movements. This is a time when what happens to man and his redemption is the important thing, not a time to divide the world into Christian camps. No one denomination is adequate to the task but together there is hope.

Disciples of Christ have approximately twenty-four missionaries who are involved full time in ecumenical and cooperative projects. Approximately 19% of the total budget of world mission is expected in cooperative, union and ecumenical projects. We feel that this is a wholesome proportion of the budget and personnel to be used in the larger cooperative interest of the Kingdom of God. However, it is very evident that Protestant missions which are willing to face their task cooperatively are going to be asked to greatly increase their ecumenical participation.

In planning for the future it is quite obvious that the Disciples of Christ will become increasingly involved in ever enlarging participation in cooperative and ecumenical movements. This will necessitate our being willing to provide missionaries and workers to ecumenical enterprises in which the Disciples of Christ have no expectation of seeing a distinctly Disciple return. In other words we will be following the scripture injunction that "he who would save his life must lose it." We will be concerned in building the Kingdom of God without denominational label.

Disciples of Christ are being challenged by great ecumenical projects throughout the world. We are now participating in the Theological Education Fund of the International Missionary Council and in significant ecumenical projects in relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation through the World Council of Churches.

There are a number of new and significant ecumenical programs evolving in which the Disciples of Christ must have a share. These are the great literacy and literature programs of the National Council of Churches through its Committee on World Literacy and Christian Literature and the Committee on Radio, Visual Education and Mass Communication. To man these enterprises technically trained people must be provided on literature, literacy and mass communications. The budgetary askings will run into literally tens of thousands of dollars. Disciples of Christ must be a part of the struggle to capture man's mind for his gospel.

Significant development is being made in the areas of the organization of the younger churches of mission lands. The churches of East Asia have organized the East Asia Christian Conference. There will soon be such conferences in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. All of these will demand more and more of the cooperating denominations of the west.

Another significant issue which we must face as a people deals with the problem of ecumenical relations within the local churches abroad. One of the most vexing issues in our relationship is brought out in the fact of membership. In our relationship with ecumenical movements and with union churches abroad there is an ecumenical encounter which deals specifically with the problem of church membership. The missionaries of The United Christian Missionary Society continue to practice baptism by immersion as a requisite of church membership and this should be continued because in this way we witness to the value of believer's baptism by immersion. However, churches in united church organizations are faced with the requirement for full fellowship in membership. The reality of membership exchange among churches practicing different methods of baptism as a part of their tradition must be faced honestly. A church of former Disciple background feels bound to accept into full fellowship individuals who come to it and desire membership in full standing. To refuse means to basically dis-fellowship themselves with those with whom they have united. To make those involved "affiliate" or "associated" members is to make them feel that their former church relationship relegates them to second class members in this particular fellowship. It is the judgment of the Division of World Mission that not only should Disciples of Christ face this issue but Protestantism generally must find a ne wand creative approach to this vexing problem. This is a time when we can give creative leadership to something that affects the whole unity of the Church of Christ throughout the world.

It has been suggested that the churches on the mission fields face this realistically and find a way by which they can participate in a plan of ecumenical membership. This would operate in the local churches of the Disciples of Christ and these churches would continue to practice baptism only by immersion. The churches would provide a membership category for those seeking fellowship but who declined baptism by immersion because they wished to retain their historic connection and tradition. We could call this an ecumenical roll wherein such a member would be listed under the

name of the church with which he is affiliated (such as Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, etc.). Upon his leaving the fellowship of the church he would leave as a Methodist or Presbyterian or Congregationalist, not as a Disciple. During his period of membership, however, he would be accorded full fellowship with the church in which he had requested fellowship.

This method, it seems to us, would enable us to solve the problem of church membership with integrity. It does not bear the connotation of God's purpose for his world and the oneness of the approach to him.

The next quarter of a century promises to be a significantly cooperative era of Christian history. Indeed some have called it the ecumenical era. If Disciples of Christ with their concern of Christian unity fail to be a part of this we will have missed our calling.

The Division of World Mission of The United Christian Missionary Society in trying to face this as a matter of policy has had to ask itself four questions:

1. Are the Disciples of Christ willing to send missionaries when requested to do so by the younger churches which will direct and administer their activities whether this is in our confessional pattern or not?
2. Are the Disciples of Christ willing to send money when asked for help by churches across the world which have Christian needs to be met?
3. Are the Disciples of Christ willing to establish churches and institutions which do not necessarily fall into the confessional image of the Disciples of Christ as a denomination?
4. Are the Disciples of Christ ready to face realistically the problem of church membership as concerned with the issues involved in ecumenical relationships?

These questions, if answered affirmatively by our people, would mean basically that we are admitting that we have already achieved a basic unity in Christ and that we are willing to adopt as policy procedures that will enable the Disciples of Christ to make a creative contribution to the ecumenical movement of world Christianity. No one knows at the present time what the outcome will be but we trust in God that this is the direction that we should go. We would not for a moment try to negate what we are already doing in cooperation and the absolute necessity of continuing and reinforcing it to the limit of our ability. We should pour personnel

and money into these great cooperative enterprises. We should establish pools of funds and personnel to be used where needed. Moreover, it is our feeling that until we as churches assume as basic policy the priority of the ecumenical demand upon us we have left an escape for our confessionalism and its continued sovereignty over us all.

This means we would continue to re-enforce to the full extent of our ability the regular program of Disciple missions. There are great areas of missionary work in which Disciples should be carrying their program and expanding it, but the issue is whether we are willing to structure our administration in such a way that we face realistically our ecumenical involvements as we do our involvements in regular Disciple missionary programs in Latin America, Africa or the Far East.

Therefore, it seems to the Division of World Mission that we must face policy along the following lines:

1. That The United Christian Missionary Society state as a definite policy that it will seek to participate in ecumenical outreach with the same enthusiasm and devotion as it does in distinctly Disciple mission outreach.
2. That the ecumenical and cooperative concerns of the church shall be given equal consideration with Disciple mission concerns in the provision of budget and personnel.
3. That The United Christian Missionary Society through its Division of World Mission will be willing to send and support missionary personnel in distinctly ecumenical situations where they will be under the administration and direction of the ecumenical body to which they are assigned.
4. That The United Christian Missionary Society through its Division of World Mission will send funds to ecumenical projects and missions under the direction and administration of properly certified ecumenical leadership.
5. That The United Christian Missionary Society through its Division of World Mission will share with the other churches around the world in the establishment of churches and institutions from which the Disciples of Christ as such will not receive any confessional identity.
6. That The United Christian Missionary Society suggest to our churches abroad, to which we are related, that they explore the possibility of establishing ecumenical fellowship rolls which would enable them to solve the problem of church membership with integrity and in a spiritual context rather than controversy.

THE STRATEGY OF ECUMENICAL CONCERNS: SOME THEOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

By WILLIAM BAIRD

DISCIPLES will basically agree with a strategy of mission which gives attention to ecumenical concerns. The plea for the unity of God's people has been central to Disciple thought. Disciples have participated with vigor in the ecumenical movement. They have been involved in the world mission of the church—a mission which has pointed up the unity we have as well as the need of the unity we seek. The ecumenical movement and cooperative participation in world mission have enjoyed exceptional popularity in the immediate past. There are now appearing on the horizon signs of approaching storm. The World and National Councils are under severe attack; missionary programs of sectarian character display enthusiasm. It is a time, then, when a serious commitment to a strategy of ecumenical concerns is significant; it is a time when the historic witness of Disciples to the oneness of the church can again be proclaimed with prophetic courage.

The document, "Strategy of Ecumenical Concerns," therefore, is correct in describing the present as a time of decision. Either we must continue missionary activity on the basis of cooperative neighborliness, or we must commit ourselves to the world-wide mission of the church. The document is correct, too, in insisting that the basis for this commitment must be grounded in our faith. The question is not a matter of pragmatic concern or organizational efficiency. The call to the one mission of the one church is a theological concern. Unfortunately the document stresses primarily matters of a negative nature—the sin of division, the easy maintainance of confessional patterns. Actually the theological basis for unity is positive; God has called a people who were once no people to become the people of God (I Pet. 2:10).

The document is also weak at the point of Disciple thought in relation to the theological basis for unity. It is pointed out in the "Strategy" quite correctly that Disciples understand their work for unity as their main reason-to-be. However, it is not clearly stated that the Disciple fathers believed this unity was to be grounded on certain theological principles, namely, the restoration of the New Testament order. Failure to remember this insistence on a doctrinal ground for unity has led a certain segment of the Brotherhood to view the ecumenical movement as itself the return

to Jerusalem. On the other hand, exclusive pre-occupation with the restoration basis of unity has diverted some heirs of the Campbellian tradition away from the main goal of the original plea.

Now it ought to be obvious that a mechanical understanding of the restoration plea must be abandoned; it has been widely imitated, it has been highly ineffective, and it is theologically wrong. Serious study of the New Testament indicates that the presupposed blueprint is lacking, while the plea itself has been turned into an extra-biblical creed as divisive as anything Campbell and Stone encountered. That to which the plea pointed, however, is still to be found in the New Testament; it is still worthy of theological emulation. That principle is well-stated in the ancient slogan: "No creed but Christ." This means, God has revealed his will in a person in the midst of history—a person to whom men commit their lives in faith. No creed, not even one quoting chapter and verse, can contain him; he is himself the Word of God (Jn. 1:14). Those who accept this personal revelation in faith constitute the church which is his body. Those principles which embody his spirit are the only essentials to the life of the Church. Yet these principles can never be crystallized into fixed forms, for the spirit ever breaks the old and makes all things new. It is this sort fo theology on which the unity of the church may be built, and it is to this sort of a theologically grounded unity that the Disciples should bear witness.

Another basic problem of the document under consideration is an apparent contradiction between its theoretical implications and its policy recommendations. On p. 5, the "Strategy" raises four questions: 1) are the Disciples willing to send missionaries at the request and under the direction of the younger churches, 2) are the Disciples willing to support ecumenical mission projects with funds, 3) are the Disciples willing to establish churches and institutions of a non-Disciple character, 4) are the Disciples ready to face the problem of ecumenical membership in the church. The clearly implied answer to all of these queries is, Yes. Yet, when one considers the recommended policy, something less than this high ideal is in evidence. The Yes answer suggests that Disciples are ready to put ecumenical concerns above denominational; the policy indicates that considerable sanction is to be given to denominational interests. Thus it is stated that the UCMS "will seek to participate in the ecumenical outreach with the same enthusiasm and devotion as it does in distinctly Disciple mission outreach." It is said that

"ecumenical and cooperative concerns of the church shall be given equal priority with Disciple mission concerns."

Now this molifying of implied principles displays practical concern. Even though Disciples are already using personnel and money for ecumenical projects, many people in the pew are not ready to accept the radical demands of a truly ecumenical strategy. Nevertheless, the implications should be sharply drawn. Ecumenical mission does not suggest the *same* enthusiasm or *equal* priority for non-Disciples concerns, it demands higher priority for ecumenical projects. This is not to deny, but to affirm the Disciple plea for unity on the basis of commitment to Christ. To suggest an exclusively Disciple mission is to preserve the sectarian spirit which Disciple theology hopes to destroy.

Having considered the "Strategy" in general terms, let us turn to some of the specific issues which the document raises.

1. The problem of Disciples participation in movements toward unity. It should be evident that Disciples both in this country and abroad ought to give serious attention to involvement in mergers and movements toward church union. Final decision must be left, according to our present policy, with the local congregations. However, it is evident that Disciples here and particularly on the mission fields have structures which transcend the local church. In so far as these structures are confronted with proposals for union, responsible and representative decision must be made. Moreover, Disciple tradition and consensus do move those involved to significant ecumenical action. That tradition, however, will urge Disciples to participate only in those movements toward unity which allow a clear witness to the oneness of the church on the basis of commitment to Christ. To participate in a merger which will not allow this kind of witness is to deter the cause of unity. To remain aloof from a merger which does allow such a witness is also to deny our heritage.

2. The problem of Disciples establishing non-Disciple institutions and churches. This is one of the four questions which the document raises and to which it hopes to ellicit an affirmative answer. Obviously, the response from certain Disciple quarters will be, No. The answer actually can be neither a clear-cut Yes or No. When Disciples refuse to support non-Disciple institutions, this often reveals that the Disciples claim to possess the true pattern of the church, and that since this institution does not follow the blueprint, it must not be supported. This ego-centric boast that "*I* belong to Christ" (I Cor. 1:12) stands under the

judgment of God, and represents a sectarian denial that the church is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one. It also seems to forget that Christ has other sheep which are not of this fold. (Jn. 10:16). On the other hand, to support institutions which deny the unity of the church or which understand that unity as demanding something beyond the confession, "Jesus Christ is Lord," is to deny the very freedom of unity in Christ which is fundamental to the church's true existence.

3. Ecumenical membership. It is clear that full participation in certain movements toward unity creates problems for the traditional Disciple position on church membership. The problems mainly revolve around the meaning and practice of baptism. The document under consideration proposes a new solution: ecumenical membership. The proposal is attractive since the new terminology at least avoids the emotionally charged pitfalls of "open membership" and "associate membership." The latter is clearly without biblical or theological ground and has the practical effect of classifying some members of the Christian community as "second class citizens." The term "open membership" has some negative overtones for which some of its enthusiastic supporters are to blame. There are some valid reasons for practicing "open membership," but they do not include the dubious theological notion that baptism is of little importance, or the pragmatic conclusion that whatever may impede the success of the new congregation in the suburbs is to be abandoned.

Now "ecumenical membership" may either acuminate or alleviate these problems of membership. As it is described in the document, for instance, ecumenical membership still seems to condone the notion of second class citizenship; while a Christian is associated with a Disciple congregation, he is received as an ecumenical member even though he refuses our mode of baptism. But when he returns to some other segment of the church, he is classified as Methodist, Baptist, or Presbyterian. The impression is still given that we are the only true Christians. Would it not be better to join with other fragments of the body of Christ in defining ecumenical membership so that all members of all communions will be classified *first* as members of the Church, and *secondly* as members of the Presbyterian, Baptist, or *Disciple* segment of the body of Christ. Such an understanding of ecumenical membership would be more consistent with the clear implication of our document—that ecumenical concerns have priority over denominational. It would also witness to the real worth of the open membership position, namely,

that all those who belong to Christ should be recognized as members of his body, the church.

This leads to the suggestion that Disciples must begin to do some hard thinking about baptism. The appearance of recent books and articles on the subject by some of our most capable theologians is, therefore, gratifying. Disciples need to ask, Why do we insist on this mode? Because it is supported by Scriptural blueprint? Because it offers a better symbolism? Is the real issue the amount of water or the meaning? Should we be more concerned about the mode of baptism or about the age of the candidate? Easy answers are not forthcoming, but it is evident that some of the traditional answers become trapped in relativity, and impress the uninitiated observer as concern with triviality. The moment we admit that the "pious unimmersed" are really pious, we relegate immersion to a secondary status. It seems that the clearest sign of membership in the body of Christ is participation in the service of his table. In comparison with that, having one's name on the mailing list seems of little significance.

Now it is often held that Disciples should maintain their traditional witness to believer baptism by immersion because of its *relative* value. This could be accomplished by adopting the theory of ecumenical membership suggested above. The Disciples would continue within the body of Christ as that movement which witnesses to a particular (or should we say, a universal) understanding and practice of baptism. Christians may belong to the Church without receiving believers' immersion, but they may share fully in the Disciple witness only by participating in adult baptism by immersion.

Some Disciples, of course, will not remain long comfortable in this position. They will remember that as well as their baptismal tradition, Disciples have a heritage of unity in essentials and of making the door of the Church as wide as the gate of heaven. Thus for Disciples to insist rigidly on something as essential for participation in the Disciple movement which is not essential for participation in the Church is quite as much a denial of our tradition as abandonment of believers' baptism. Moreover, to be forced to understand the Disciple movement as a segment of the Church whose practices no matter how valid continue to support the Church's fragmentation will seem to some of the heirs of Campbell and Stone, a strange anomaly.

Indeed, it seems that Disciples are faced with the dilemma of either modifying their witness to baptism, or of relinquishing their

role in the uniting of the Church. Some have abandoned the baptismal witness with ease only to find themselves condoning views and practices of baptism which are almost as repulsive as "closed membership." This indicates, too, that any view of "open membership" or "ecumenical membership" which involves validating certain modes of baptism may rest on shakey theological foundation; one is accepted into the church—indeed, God adds him to the church—on the basis of his commitment to Christ; baptism in any mode is an outward sign of the act by God and the acceptance by the church of his confession of faith.

But perhaps "ecumenical membership" could help to resolve the dilemma: congregations of the Disciple tradition would continue to *practice* immersion because of its relative theological value, but would recognize as full members of the body of Christ all those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. Thus, genuine participation in movements of merger and union could provide a witness to believer baptism by immersion where it would get a hearing. Perhaps Disciples have too long hoarded their treasure, holding tightly to their heritage in an insecure manner which belies forceful conviction and neglects the promise of our Lord, that the spirit will lead men, including ourselves, into all truth.

Some minor difficulties remain in the document. For example, a terminology should be sought which avoids the unconscious downgrading of some segments of the world Church through refering to them as "younger churches." Also in the "Strategy" lip service seems to be given to a view of biblical authority which the framers of the document could state only with tongue in cheek. The whole force of the document speaks against restorationism and sectarian interpretation. It would be better, then, to ground the whole document on a sound biblical theology, to state that theology unequivocally throughout the document, and to avoid giving impression that the Bible is to be surrendered to those who through a pseudo-loyalty distort it for their own purposes.

None of these criticisms should be understood as discrediting the "Strategy of Ecumenical Concerns." Its weaknesses mainly result from an attempt to communicate a challenging message to a Brotherhood which has forgotten much of its own heritage. The document is a forthright and prophetic statement; it articulates the mission of the church and the Disciples with clarity; it offers principles which can guide practice where heretofore there has been ambiguity. The document, of course, does not solve the problems; in a sense it serves to point them up. For beneath all the strategies

of ecumenical action there is the reality of the divided Church. As long as the Church is still conceived in terms of ecumenical church and denominational segments, the prayer of our Lord remains unanswered. But perhaps a clearer policy of world mission will hasten the day when God will make his people one.

STATEMENT BY GEORGE BEAZLEY

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY, COUNCIL ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

RE: RESOLUTION NO. 52, CONCERNING POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

KANSAS CITY ASSEMBLY, INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)

THOUGH I am always proud of my Disciple heritage and of this assmbled body of the International Convention, I have never been prouder of the members of the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) than when, on Saturday morning, this assembly adopted Resolution No. 49 without a dissenting vote. While I am sure this action certifies that you will accept the unanimous action of the Recommendations Committee to disapprove Resolution No. 52 (since it denies that which you have affirmed through Resolution No. 49), I have been asked by the Resolutions Committee to bring to you a few of the observations which I presented to the subsection when they considered this resolution.

All of us are regretfully aware of the present vigorous attack on the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America by certain groups which seek to gag the church of the living God on all but what they denominate "spiritual" and "moral" issues. As has been pointed out in Resolution No. 49, this attempt to thus limit the voice of the church is not only a denial of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over *all* of life but is also contrary to our American tradition. It is, on the other hand, in line with the action of all types of totalitarian states. It was this principle which formed the basis for the incarceration of German pastors by Hitler and is the principle by which many Communist states seek to destroy the church today. It is doubly unfortunate, therefore, that many who most insistantly seek to defend America against Communist infiltration have unwittingly chosen the method of their enemies and have made glad the hearts of Communist leaders by attacking those very institutions which have historically been the one sure bulwark against all forms of totalitarianism.

Attackers of the National Council fall into three main classes. First, there are the hate mongers. These thrive, like all parasites, only by sucking out the life force of other organisms, having within themselves no positive creative abilities. Apparently, many of these

are making tax-free fortunes from the peddling of suspicion, divisiveness and muck.

Then, there are those who consciously or unconsciously are resentful of the claim of Jesus Christ on all of men's lives. Because their consciences are pricked but they cannot bear to surrender themselves to his lordship, they are happy to believe the worst about the church and its organizations of cooperation that they may feel excused from doing their Christian duty.

Lastly, there are the confused. It is all too easy to accept that questionable statement that where there is so much smoke, there must be some fire. One often forgets that smoke bombs can be planted by those who wish to deceive. The Council's detractors, to accomplish their ends, have discarded the ancient principle of British and American law that a man is innocent until he is proven guilty. They have cast aside the principle of fair play which has been an American habit of action from our earliest history. Often the fear and suspicion aroused by hate mongers in the hearts of honest Christians can temporarily cause them to forget the Christian gospel has no limits in its concern. Many of them will have regrets when calmer days return them to sober moods. This will be, I believe, the case of the signers of this resolution, who, we have been assured, have shown real Christian insight before they were panicked into this action by forces which we can only estimate.

Attacks on the National Council of Churches take many forms, but they all boil down to a questioning of the Council's right to speak on many views which do not represent the opinions of the constituency of the churches that are a part of it. Strictly speaking, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America has never claimed to speak for anyone other than itself.

In a looser sense, it does speak for its member churches, but as a *prophetic voice,* not a strictly *representative voice.* Its relation to its constituency is much like that of a minister to the congregation he serves. A preacher whose sermons were merely the statistical average of the religion of his congregation would be of no use to his church. He must proclaim the mercy and judgment of God as he sees it.

The Bible does not suggest that Amos took a poll of the shepherds of Judea before he brought his condemnation of unrighteousness on the social and political sins of Israel. Jesus, our Lord and perfect example, hardly polled the twelve, much less Jerusalem, before he pronounced judgment on the traders in the temple. Paul

did not assess his constituency in Asia Minor and Greece before he wrote a stinging rebuke to Corinth for their sins against God. Just so, the National Council serves the nation best, not by polling every congregation of every member church and giving averages, but by speaking the prophetic word of God as it is understood by a wide cross section of the leadership, both lay and ministerial, of much of Protestantism and Orthodoxy in America. That the Council makes mistakes, not even its most ardent defenders would deny. That it makes fewer mistakes than its attackers, they would confidently affirm. That it has no right to speak this prophetic voice, they would utterly repudiate in the tradition of those apostles who said "we must obey God rather than men."

And its membership is representative. Speaking for our own brotherhood, we can say that they are democratically chosen. They are nominated by our Ecumenical Appointments Committee, consisting of the presidents and executive secretaries of the International Convention and the Council on Christian Unity, one minister, one layman, and one lay woman. They are elected for three year terms by the International Convention. They are no unknowns to you. Our present five votes, based on our membership, are divided between ten people, as Council custom permits. These are: Hampton Adams, pastor of Park Avenue Christian Church in New York; your speaker, George Beazley, executive secretary of the Council on Christian Unity; Mrs. Ivan Cole, president of International Christian Women's Fellowship; Gaines Cook, executive secretary of the International Convention; Perry Gresham, president of the Convention; Jack Jarman, pastor of University Church in Champaign, Illinois; Mrs. Russell Putnam, former president of International C.W.F.; Mrs. John Starr of Country Club Christian Church here in Kansas City; David Nelson Sutton, a lawyer of West Point, Virginia; and Orville Wake, president of Lynchburg College. In addition to these elected representatives, we have well known Disciples like Irwin Miller, A. Dale Fiers, Virgil Sly, Willard Wickizer, Harlie Smith, and probably others I have failed to mention, who have been elected to office and therefore to vote by the Council itself.

These people are no vague "they" of whom we should be suspicious. They are certainly neither subversives nor dupes. They, and people like them from our sister portions of the body of Christ, make up the General Board of this great organization of cooperation, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and bring their best thinking on the

relevance of the gospel of Jesus Christ to current issues before the nation we love in the name of the Creator revealed in Jesus Christ, who has endowed us all with life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and under whose judgment and grace our nation and all nations stand.